

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

Minutes Tuesday 7/12/2022

Members Attending: Alan Botula, Chair; Shannon Jackson; Betsy Dunn, Clerk; Ken Signorello; Steve Dowd
Members Absent: Mike Spaeder, Vice Chair; Lauren Gaffney Cohen; Rusty Brink; Erin DeVries
Staff Present: Darren Schibler, Town Planner
Members of the public: Charlotte Cadow, VT Urban & Community Forestry Program; Margaret Smith

Meeting called to order at 6:33 PM by Alan

AGENDA ITEM 1: Election of Officers

Darren read the duties of all officers. The committee asked if anyone already serving as an officer would like to remain in that office. Betsy stated that she would be fine to continue as clerk. Steve thought with 4 members not attending tonight's meeting we should delay the selection of officers. And if you are interested in an office email Darren so that it can be put on the next agenda.

Dunn made a motion, seconded by Jackson, to table officer elections until the next meeting. The motion passed 5-0.

AGENDA ITEM 2: Agenda Additions and Changes

No changes to the agenda were proposed.

AGENDA ITEM 3: Public to Be Heard

No members of the public spoke during public to be heard.

AGENDA ITEM 4: Short Items

A. Minutes

After a question from Botula was clarified regarding the motion on adding "board member comments" to future agendas, **Signorello made a motion, seconded by Dowd, to approve the minutes of June 14, 2022. The motion passed 5-0.**

B. Black Ash Inventory – Charlotte Cadow, Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Program (VT UCF)

The presentation was by Charlotte Cadow intern with VT UCF, she has been in contact with Darren regarding this issue. She gave some background on the Black Ash. First, this specie has no resistance to or tolerance of the EAB.

Therefore, we must find ways to conserve it. Second, it is an important tree for riparian and wetlands it mitigates floods and provides wildlife habitat. Third, it has a deep cultural significance for the Abenaki Indians who use splints from the trees in their basket weaving. They would like to stockpile the splints and save seeds to preserve the genetic diversity of local trees for future planting. She and Darren came up with an idea to use the Horton land that is swampy and that is terrific for Black Ash. Charlotte would love to show our community several videos about the Black Ash and couple that with a community walk. Plan: to touch base with Ali Vile at Parks and Recreation and get these in their program for the fall. The committee has tentatively decided on a walk on the Horton land with her on September 24th.

C. Street Tree Management Planning for 2023

Alan is point on this item. He reported that so far we have had 30 trees removed and determined that another 14 ash trees are good candidates for biennial injection of insecticides for long term preservation. There may be more trees added to the list for preservation if recommended by the CTC. A controversy has developed with the Public Works Department. They do not want to remove 220 trees and replace them over a 8 year period, especially on areas where the green belt (the ground between the sidewalk and the street) is narrow as it does not support the healthy growth of trees. Of the 220 trees in the initial list 133 ash trees on the streets have conflicts with underground utilities, overhead power lines, and other reasons why they cannot be replaced in the same location. VT UCF has recommendations that there should be no net loss of canopy due to pest management practices. Therefore, we have several options in the replacement of these trees:

1. Replace trees on private property nearby
2. Replant with smaller trees or shrubs whose roots will not impact the underground utilities
3. Replant trees in a completely different location
4. Don't proactively replace the trees

A discussion ensued. **Betsy** asked if we could grow our own trees and said that she heard the UVM Horticultural Extension has a program that if we pay them, they will grow the trees for us. She will investigate this before the next meeting. **Steve** mentioned that residents are distraught over losing their trees and they would be happy to get a new tree. **Ken** thinks that the homeowner needs to have some skin in the game. Possibly a 50/50 split of the costs. Rather than the town footing the whole bill. **Darren** the costs for each tree to be treated with the insecticide approximately 825\$/tree. **Steve** asked about how many trees do we need each year? He thinks that we may be able to get 70 trees from the Forestry division at CTE. It might be a good project for them. **Alan** will look at the Unsworth property its mostly forested but has a good sized meadow for trees to grow. He also wants to run down all the leads before the next meeting so that we can have a proposal for the Selectboard by October.

D. Invasives at Indian Brook Park and Fall Clean-Up Day Preparation

Steve and Shannon are point on this. The most important issue is having a certified Insecticide applicator present when we are doing this work. Darren will check with Ali at Parks and Recreation if Mark Gibson (an employee) can be present or can we hire a professional. Betsy will investigate what it takes, (cost, time, and length of certification) to become certified. We will change the fall cleanup to an invasive day again to get rid of more of the buckthorn and honeysuckle.

E. Water Quality Projects

Erin is point on this. She has been working on a plan with Darren and due to her absence we will table this to our next meeting

F. Historic Resource Page for CTC Website

Signorello presented the historic resource page he prepared. Schibler will try to post as soon as possible, hopefully Friday or Monday.

AGENDA ITEM 5: Business Items

A. Spongy Moth Monitoring Plan

Ken is point on this. Ken held a meeting with Chuck, Shannon, and Betsy. During the meeting a member of the public Patricia Crooker sat in on the meeting. First order of business was to state our goal. We need to find the area of the greatest infestation in Essex to complete a survey. Second, we need to know how many volunteers we will have to great a grid. ANR has a policy on this so we will follow their procedure. Chuck will go to the ANR offices in Essex to confirm that we have the right information on the procedure.

The standard procedure is to have the GPS coordinates, and the person will walk into the woods for 5 minutes and, without looking all around, note the number of egg masses they see. They will do the same on the can get way back to their starting position. They will do this once a week or as often as they wish. We will require at least 100 GPS coordinates for the survey. More would be better. We will have to trainings for all volunteers. We conduct the survey from fall to spring.

We will check with Darren if there is a Satellite imagery of our town with the greatest infestation areas. We do know that Indian brook, and the western parts of the town were hit hard as well as Pinecrest and Pinewood. We will also check with ANR, GIS and Ethan Tapper.

AGENDA ITEM 6: Development Review

- A. 1 LeClerc Woods.** This 8-unit PUD has been approved at sketch but is preparing to submit for preliminary review. There are two issues of concern for the CTC:

First, the proposal includes conserving 103.8 acres of the remaining 171.3 acres of the parcel as open space; should this area be open to recreation, or left as a natural / wildlife habitat area with minimal disturbance (especially considering the presence of large, ecologically-significant wetlands known as Lost Nation Swamp)? The CTC agreed that it should be a wildlife area, and also expressed concern about the development of future lots as shown on the master plan; Schibler noted that these would not be formally approved as part of this project and may never be developed, but it is possible.

The second issue was whether to require an easement for a multi-use path along the property's boundary with VT-289, which is shown as a proposed walk / bike trail in the Town Plan and typically would be required. However, the terrain for such a trail would be very challenging. The CTC agreed that this easement should be required for potential future use, even if a trail is not established immediately.

B. 87 Pinecrest Drive

This is 20 acres of land with 32 duplex townhomes proposed. The proposed trees are all the same species, so staff and the CTC would require better diversity to prevent loss from a single pest or disease. The trees also must be relocated at least 10 feet away from any underground utilities for reasons discussed earlier in the meeting.

The area they have chosen for a community garden has no access to water; the CTC agreed that this should be repurposed into some other recreation space that is not water-dependent.

C. 271 Chapin Road

Schibler described the proposal to create a new 6-acre lot from the roughly 580-acre Matthews farm. He is unclear what the family's plans are since the owner passed away, but noted that this is the largest farm parcel and the only remaining dairy farm in Essex, and is concerned about the possibility of future development. He asked the CTC for assistance in approaching the landowner to propose a conservation easement, possibly working with Vermont Land Trust.

AGENDA ITEM 7: Reading File

CTC members provided brief comments. Schibler noted that FEMA Map Updates are an important item in the reading file. Schibler also mentioned that the Town is organizing an "Explore Essex" festival for the first weekend in October, and asked the CTC for help reaching out to farms who may be interested in participating in some way.

Jackson made a motion, seconded by Signorello, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 5-0 at 8:53pm.

Draft minutes submitted by Betsy Dunn, Clerk and Darren Schibler, Town Planner. Minutes approved August 9, 2022.