

Essex Conservation and Trails Committee (CTC)
Regular Meeting Minutes
81 Main St. Essex Jct., VT 05452
October 8, 2024

Minutes Submitted by Clerk Duane Millar Barlow, Approved November 12, 2024

Attendees

Committee Members:

Present: Ken Signorello, Chair; Shannon Jackson, Vice Chair; Duane Millar Barlow, Clerk; Bino Cummings; Paul Davis; Steve Dowd; Betsy Dunn; April Peterson; Morgan Kirk (Remote)

Staff: Kent Johnson

Public: Chuck Vile (Town Tree Warden), Lorraine Zaloom

1. CALL TO ORDER

Meeting called to order by Ken Signorello at 6:30 PM, The committee confirmed they had a quorum.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

No additions or changes.

3. PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public comments.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Minutes from September 10th meeting were approved with two changes.

5. POTENTIAL ACTION ITEMS

a. Consider changing regular meeting time

There was discussion about the length of the meeting and it was motioned and approved unanimously that the regular meeting time would be moved to start earlier at 6p to allow

for more to get done without ending at an unreasonable time.

b. Advise on Planning Commission development applications

No applications this month, 2 expected in the next regular meeting.

c. Ratify changes to Tree Nursery MOU

The committee reviewed and discussed changes to the Tree Nursery Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Key changes included updating the number of trees (30 initially, then 10 per year thereafter). The committee decided to remove specific tree species from the MOU, instead describing them as "a diverse selection of trees." They discussed the source of the trees (Family Tree Nurseries) and the budget allocation for the project.

After making the agreed-upon changes, the committee voted unanimously to accept the amended MOU. The approved MOU will be used for budgeting purposes and to support a grant application for the tree nursery project.

d. Approve budget recommendations for tree removal planting etc. FY26 time

Steve reported on discussions with Public Works about tree replacement and removal.

Public Works has budgeted \$14,000 for tree purchase, planting, and removal for the upcoming fiscal year. This budget covers seven trees identified for replacement, including some vacant spots where trees were previously removed. The budgeted amount significantly contributes to meeting the Tree City USA requirements.

Public Works is aware of and supportive of the Tree City USA program.

The committee decided no formal action was necessary as the budget allocation meets their needs. They acknowledged this as a positive step towards their tree management goals. The committee will use this information when applying for Tree City USA status in the future.

e. Approve recommended revisions to Committee mission/structure

The committee discussed potential revisions to its mission and structure, including the possibility of transitioning from a committee to a commission for greater autonomy and a small budget. The proposed changes aim to improve efficiency, enable direct grant applications, and allow more streamlined decision-making. After considering options like increasing meeting frequency, alternating meeting focuses, and splitting into separate groups for conservation and recreation, the committee decided to move forward with drafting a new mission statement that reflects a transition to commission status. A motion was made and passed to authorize the drafting of this new mission statement for

future review.

f. Advise on VT Urban Community Forest Program Tree Planting grant application

April gave an update for a grant application for the Tree Nursery project. The grant needs to be between \$5,000 and \$25,000. For grants under \$25,000, the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission recommends they act as the fiduciary agent to manage it.

The committee is still working on getting quotes for labor and site prep work to finalize the budget. They need to prepare several documents for the application, including a completed form, budget worksheet, site plan, tree table, and letters of support.

There was discussion about whether the municipality needs to pay first and then get reimbursed, which April agreed to look into.

The committee plans to have the application ready for review and approval at the November meeting.

g. Action on EMS Project proposal

The committee briefly discussed the Essex Middle School (EMS) project proposal focused on improving tree maintenance on school grounds. It was noted that coordination with school representatives is needed to address tree care concerns. Due to limited progress on the proposal, the committee decided to revisit this topic at the next meeting after further outreach and collaboration with the school district. No formal actions were taken at this time.

h. Approve advisory to reinstate Trail Caretakers Program

The committee discussed reinstating the Trail Caretakers Program, which involves community volunteers maintaining assigned sections of town trails. Responsibilities include light trail maintenance, reporting fallen trees, and monitoring trail conditions, especially after storms. The committee aims to provide training and guidance to volunteers and emphasized the importance of focusing on town-owned trails. A draft advisory outlining the program's structure and volunteer expectations will be prepared for review at a future meeting. No formal action was taken during this session, pending the final draft.

6. UPDATES AND REPORTS

a. Report on Indian Brook Fall clean-up

The committee reported on the successful Indian Brook Fall clean-up event. The event had a strong turnout, contributing significant volunteer hours toward improving trail

conditions. The committee reminded members to log their volunteer hours for the event to ensure proper documentation. A marked improvement in Buckthorn reduction compared to previous years. The group reached a clearing that hadn't been accessed in previous cleanups. Some large tagged Buckthorn trees from previous Boy Scout efforts were removed. There were still many berry-bearing Buckthorn plants, indicating ongoing maintenance will be necessary. The committee discussed the need for persistence in Buckthorn control due to long-lasting seeds and bird dispersal. The event yielded an applicant for the Economic Development Commission, highlighting the benefits in events like these.

Overall, the committee viewed the cleanup as a successful community engagement and invasive species management effort.

b. Report on Explore Essex

The committee had a booth at the Explore Essex event, which was well-attended. Trail maps were a popular attraction, drawing people to the booth. Visitors were also interested in seeing emerald ash borer specimens in vials. Betsy collected names of individuals interested in becoming trail caretakers.

Other town departments, including Planning and Public Works, had booths nearby, allowing for interdepartmental networking. The committee noted the need for their own banner for future events.

Overall, the event was seen as a good opportunity for community outreach and engagement.

c. Indian Brook Forest Management Plan Execution meeting prep

The committee discussed an upcoming meeting about the execution of the Indian Brook Forest Management Plan. Key points include:

1. Two harvest operations are mentioned in the plan, to be conducted by the County Forester next summer, with execution the following winter.
2. The access would be via the McGee Road corridor.
3. The plan follows Ethan Tapper's forestry philosophy, aiming to build resiliency and improve habitat.
4. There will be an upgrade to McGee Road, with the extent depending on timber sale revenue.
5. The committee prepared questions for the next meeting, including:
 - The number of trees to be removed
 - Impact on existing trails and potential for new trails
 - Post-harvest restoration plans
 - Location and size of the landing area for logging
 - Potential for additional parking areas
 - History of past harvests and revenue generated

6. The committee plans to involve Adrian from Parks & Rec in the next meeting to address these questions.
7. There was mention of the need for public outreach, particularly to residents near McGee Road, about the upcoming forest management activities.

The committee plans to discuss this topic in more detail at their next meeting, with more information and answers to their questions.

d. Report on Mathieu Forest trail relocation

The committee reported on the progress of the Mathieu Forest trail relocation. The committee met with Tina Heath, the wetlands coordinator, along with Adrian and other members to assess the trail. Tina was impressed with the current trail layout and approved the plan. The trail will include a bridge and a boardwalk section through a wetland area. The project was approved to use funds from the Recreation Interruption Fund, eliminating the need for a grant application.

Betsy is in contact with a Scout leader about involving Eagle Scouts in building the structures.

The committee needs to update their memo to Adrian with the revised plan, including the addition of the boardwalk. The project represents a significant accomplishment for the committee to report to the Select Board.

The trail can be opened to the public once it's properly blazed.

e. Report on Sand Hill Park/Mathieu Forest trail issues

The committee discussed concerns with a trail between Sand Hill Park and Mathieu Forest. This was discovered to have been caused by inaccuracies in the town's parcel viewer data, which incorrectly shows some trail sections crossing private property. The town is aware of the discrepancy and will fix the parcel data. No other action is necessary.

f. Riverside Boat Access

The committee discussed progress on the Riverside Boat Access project. Ken contacted the Winooski Valley Park District about a feasibility study grant from Vermont Housing Conservation Board (VHCB). VHCB doesn't fund feasibility studies for projects they're not buying, but they're exploring options with Winooski Valley Park District.

A letter of intent was received from the Essex Green Park Association (HOA) just before the meeting. The HOA board is fully supportive of the project, pending a vote from HOA membership. The HOA requests that the town complete and pay for any required permitting.

The committee discussed the need to find the property deed and any restrictions on the land. A sketch of the proposed access was created and shared with VHCB, which was found helpful.

The committee is making progress on this project, addressing various aspects like funding, permissions, and technical details. They plan to potentially vote on accepting or recommending the letter of intent at the next meeting.

g. Prep for Committee meeting with Selectboard

The committee prepared for the upcoming meeting with the Selectboard, where Ken will represent the committee. The plan is to present a summary of the committee's activities, including three completed projects, three ongoing projects, and three future projects. Ken will draft this summary and share it with committee members for feedback. Additionally, Ken plans to give the Selectboard a preliminary update on the committee's efforts to transition towards commission status.

h. VT Urban Community Forest Program Tree Planting grant application for January

Skipped as it was discussed earlier in the meeting.

i. Tree City Costs spreadsheet and staff expenditure update

Skipped as it was discussed earlier in the meeting.

j. Act 171 outreach needs and suggestions

There has been no significant movement on Act 171 outreach by the assigned members. The committee briefly discussed combining Act 171 outreach with a five-year conservation survey required by the town's conservation policy.

Kent informed the committee that the town is planning a larger project for Act 171 work, likely to involve hiring a consultant. This project is expected to start next year, potentially in the fall. Committee members can participate in the future town-led project but won't need to lead the public outreach themselves. Given this information, the committee decided to put Act 171 outreach on hold for now.

The committee will need to address the five-year conservation survey separately in the future, as it's a distinct requirement.

Overall, the Act 171 outreach is currently off the agenda, with plans to revisit it as part of a larger town initiative next year.

k. Pollinator Garden at Indian Brook

The committee discussed the plans for establishing a pollinator garden at Indian Brook, targeting a springtime planting.

I. Indian Brook Trail Grant

Kent is meeting with Adrian and April on the 17th or 18th to prepare a grant application for the Recreational Trail Program. The grant aims to fund accessibility upgrades to part of the Indian Brook Trail.

The project would cover about 700 feet of trail from the boat launch to an overlook area. The plan is to add a new layer of trail material over roots and rocks to improve accessibility. This is part of a broader concept to make town trails more accessible for wheelchairs, walkers, and families with young children. The project is seen as a potential "proof of concept" that could spur interest in similar accessibility improvements on other town trails.

A grant webinar is coming up, which Adrian will attend to get more details.

This item doesn't need to be on the next meeting's agenda, but the committee views it as an exciting development.

m. Footpath Network Map in Town Plan

The committee discussed the progress on creating a trail inventory for public maps as well as for inclusion in the Town Plan. Duane has been working with Shannon, the town's GIS staff, to build the map inventory. The update highlighted the challenges with data accuracy, as many existing trails are not well represented in current town maps. This is a priority for the committee and Duane will work with Shannon (GIS staff), as well as Shannon (CTC member, who offered to collaborate on the project) to get it done.

n. Update on Town Tree Policy

Skipped as it was discussed earlier in the meeting.

o. Update on development landscaping zoning regulations

Deferred to a future meeting.

7. ADJOURN

Motion to adjourn: Moved by Shannon, seconded by Betsy (9-0).

Adjourned the meeting at 8:40 PM.

MOTIONS

- September Meeting Minutes changes. Motioned Betsy, Seconded Bino (8-0) Morgan was not present
- Change meeting time to 6p. Motioned Shannon, Seconded Betsy (9-0)

- Changes to Tree Nursery MOU. Motioned Betsy, Seconded Steve (9-0)
- Write a new mission statement as a Commission. Motioned Betsy, Seconded Duane (9-0)
- Adjourn Motioned by Shannon, Seconded by Betsy (9-0)

NEXT STEPS

- Members do more work outside of the Regular Meeting in order to make the Regular Meeting more efficient.
- Reminder that we should use Google Docs whenever possible.
- Ken will write a new mission statement about the Committee becoming a Commission.
- April will look into whether the town pays first and then gets reimbursed for the VT Urban Community Forest Program Tree Planting grant
- Everyone add their volunteer time from Indian Brook to the spreadsheet
- Chuck/Betsy contact Gary Scott regarding EMS tree project
- Duane/Betsy contact old list of Trail Caretakers as well as the new list of people
- Trail Caretaker Program - Bring Bino on board
- Steve will double check Indian Brook to see if the brush has been picked up
- Ken will add Trail Inventory to UPDATES AND REPORTS
- Chuck will come to the next meeting prepared with answers for questions about the Indian Brook Forest Management Plan:
 - How many trees would be taken out from this operation? What area? Old growth?
 - When they bring the logging machines in, will they create new trails?
 - What kind of cleanup will be done post harvest?
 - Could this be a potential for additional parking areas?
 - Has this been done in the past? When? How much revenue was generated? Some history would be helpful.
- Duane will review the MOU for the new trail in Mathieu Town Forest and make it consistent with the new plan
- Duane will make a new video of the new trail
- Bino will investigate deed information/town requirements for the boat access parcel
- Ken will send 9 things: 3 things done, 3 things in progress, 3 things we are planning to do
- Everyone should give feedback on those 9 things
- October 21st is the meeting with the Select board, recommends we come to the meeting
- Everyone should add their hours to CTC Tree Volunteer Log on the spreadsheet in the google drive

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0aVxWWFt1I>

Next Meeting: November 10th, 2024 6:00pm