ESSEX, VERMONT
CONSERVATION & TRAILS COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, AUGUST 11, 2026 - 6:15 PM

DRAFT

Draft minutes by Duane Millar Barlow

MEMBERS PRESENT: Bino Cummings, Chair; Erin De Vries, Vice Chair; Duane Millar Barlow, Clerk; Bert Bechard; Paul Davis; Carrie Macfarlane; Sarah Salatino; Ken Signorello

ABSENT: Morgan Kirk

ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Hans Nedde, Harlan Smith

PUBLIC: Cheryl Van Eps (remote)

RECORDING: Aug 11 at 6-16 PM.m4a (uploaded recording, on file with the clerk)
Times associated with each agenda item are approximate.

1. Call to Order (00:00:00)

The meeting was called to order by Chair Bino Cummings at 6:15 PM.

2. Approve Agenda (00:00:00)

The agenda was approved.

3. Agenda Additions/Changes (00:00:00)

No agenda additions or changes were made.

4a. Approve Minutes – CTC Draft Minutes 7.14.26 (00:00:20)

The chair invited members to review the draft minutes from the July 14, 2026 meeting.

A member noted that the draft minutes incorrectly attributed the conduct of the chair election to the outgoing chair, and clarified that Hans Nedde opened the floor for nominations.

A member raised a question about a line in section 7D attributing to Carrie Macfarlane the suggestion that trail adoption and trail naming should in the future be brought to the Select Board. After discussion, Ken Signorello indicated he believed he had made that suggestion, and the clerk noted he would amend the minutes accordingly.

Erin De Vries raised a concern about a line in section 7E stating that the committee had identified Morgan Kirk as the point person for the street tree management plan, noting uncertainty about whether that had been formally established. After discussion, the clerk was directed to strike that line.

KEN SIGNORELLO made a motion, seconded by BERT BECHARD, to approve the minutes of the July 14, 2026 meeting as amended. The motion passed 8-0.

5. Public to Be Heard (00:06:23)

Bino Cummings opened the Public to Be Heard portion of the meeting. Cheryl Van Eps, attending remotely, identified herself and noted that her items were listed under the business agenda, and that she would wait until those items came up. No other members of the public wished to speak.

6a. Select Date for Fall Clean Up Day (00:06:56)

The chair introduced the item and noted that Paul Davis would help the committee select a date for the fall cleanup day.

The committee discussed September 26th, the week after Community Day, as the proposed date, with a rain date of September 27th. The committee agreed the cleanup would run from noon to 2:00 PM on September 26th, with a rain date of September 27th, noon to 2:00 PM. Hans Nedde noted that he holds a pesticide license and could cover herbicide application if needed, and at least one other member indicated they also hold the necessary license.

PAUL DAVIS made a motion, seconded by KEN SIGNORELLO, to set the fall cleanup day for September 26th at noon to 2:00 PM, with a rain date of September 27th, noon to 2:00 PM. Motion passed 8-0.

6b. Town of Essex Tree Plan (00:10:46)

Harlan Smith introduced the Town of Essex Tree Plan, noting that he had been working with the Parks and Recreation staff on street trees and had been asked by Public Works to assess trees presenting problems throughout town. He reported that the emerald ash borer has arrived in the area and is already killing off several trees, with many more ash trees expected to be removed over the next three to five years. Staff is currently treating some ash trees to delay the aesthetic impact, with the understanding that those trees will eventually be removed and replaced.

Harlan noted that the tree plan is very large and extensive, and that Parks and Recreation staff do not have the capacity to manage it on their own. He explained that under the adopted Essex tree care policy, responsibility for managing the town's trees falls to the

DRAFT

Conservation and Trails Committee and the tree warden, with assistance from staff. He noted that the town currently does not have a tree warden, and that efforts to recruit one have not succeeded, as people have been deterred by the volume of work involved. He noted that the Chittenden Urban Forester could provide expertise in the interim but is not a long-term solution and would not work on the plan with the committee.

Ken Signorello suggested reaching out to the forestry program at UVM, noting that a graduate student might be interested in the tree warden position. He noted that he would look for the existing job description and try to generate interest through that channel. Erin De Vries raised the question of whether the town budget could support hiring a consultant or paying a tree warden more than the current annual stipend of approximately $1,500, given the scale of work involved, including the removal and replacement of hundreds of ash trees. Harlan agreed that the current capital budget allocation, approximately $23,000 to meet Tree City USA requirements, is not sufficient given the scope of the work ahead, and noted that any increase to the position's compensation would require a conversation with the Select Board and Town Manager.

Ken noted that the tree plan was adopted on June 18, 2018, and asked when it should be updated or readopted, suggesting a 10-year cycle consistent with forest management plans as a reference point. Harlan acknowledged that no update cycle was stipulated in the plan and that he was not aware of any implementation activity since adoption. He noted that the ANR online map contains the town's tree inventory but that the inventory is incomplete, with large portions of Essex not yet covered. Ken observed that the inventory had focused on newer developments and had not covered right-of-way trees on older roads such as Old Stage Road, where large trees exist within the town right-of-way and may need maintenance.

Harlan noted that ash trees make up approximately 16 percent of the inventoried tree population, the highest of any species, and that ash trees throughout town, including prominent trees near the post office, are visibly dying from the emerald ash borer.

Sarah Salatino raised a concern about page 18 of the tree plan, noting that imidacloprid, recommended in the plan as a treatment, is a neonicotinoid and is now illegal in the state of Vermont, providing an additional reason to update the plan.

Ken suggested that the chair place the tree plan on the agenda for action at the next meeting, with a goal of updating, revising, and readopting the plan. The chair agreed and noted that point people would be identified at the next meeting. The chair also suggested that Eagle Scouts might be a resource for inventorying trees. Harlan noted that former CTC members Steve and Betsy might be interested in volunteering to help oversee the tree plan effort.

DRAFT

Cheryl Van Eps, participating remotely, shared that she had spoken with the chair of the Richmond conservation board about the town's lack of a tree warden while working with an invasives removal group in Richmond. She also noted that Karen Adams had asked her for ideas about finding a tree warden, and that she had suggested checking UVM's forestry program. She expressed agreement with the need for a larger stipend for the position.

The committee agreed to place the Town of Essex Tree Plan on the agenda for the next meeting as an action item, with the goal of updating, revising, and readopting the plan, and to identify point people at that time.

6c. Proposal to Use Conservation Reserve Funds – 15 Kimberly Drive (00:23:12)

The committee took up the proposal to use Conservation Reserve Funds for 15 Kimberly Drive. Hans Nedde presented the background on the matter, noting that 15 Kimberly Drive had recently been sold and that the new owners, upon reviewing their property lines, discovered that the trail connecting to Pearl Street Park crossed their property without a documented easement. Research confirmed that no formal recreational easement exists along the current trail alignment; the only easement on record is a water and sewer line easement that, if used for the trail, would route it through the backyard of the neighboring condo unit at 13 Kimberly Drive, coming within approximately 10 to 15 feet of the building.

After several meetings with the owners of 15 Kimberly Drive, the preferred solution was identified as purchasing an easement over a small parcel that would allow the trail to be rerouted away from 13 Kimberly Drive and further from the 15 Kimberly Drive residence. The agreed terms include a $1,000 payment to the homeowner for the easement, plus legal and potential civil engineering costs estimated at $4,000 to $7,000 in total.

The committee noted that the Conservation Reserve Fund balance is believed to be approximately $92,000.

Ken Signorello explained the Conservation Reserve Fund application process, noting that the committee would need to prepare and submit an application to the Select Board for approval, and offered to prepare the application on the committee's behalf.

DUANE MILLAR BARLOW made a motion, seconded by ERIN DE VRIES, to authorize Ken Signorello to prepare the application for use of Conservation Reserve Funds for the purchase of an easement to realign the trail at 15 Kimberly Drive. Motion passed 8-0.

Ken Signorello will prepare and submit the Conservation Reserve Fund application for 15 Kimberly Drive to the Select Board.

DRAFT

6c. Proposal to Use Conservation Reserve Funds – 33 Windridge Road (00:42:49)

The committee took up the proposal to use Conservation Reserve Funds in connection with a 2.04-acre parcel at 33 Windridge Road. Harlan Smith explained that during the trail naming process the committee had discovered a slight easement problem with the trail at that location: the trail varies off from the waterline easement at its tail end, and that correction was never fully captured in the deed even though it had been discussed during the original Development Review Board process. He noted that the developer had been required to install a pedestrian bridge as part of that approval, which was completed. Harlan Smith indicated that the town plans to approach the property owner to correct the easement, and that in conversations with the owner he raised the possibility of the owner donating the parcel outright to the Town of Essex so that the town could take responsibility for the trails and address erosion issues on the property. The owner agreed to donate the property provided the town covers all costs associated with the transfer, including legal fees.

Harlan Smith and Hans Nedde noted that both had visited the parcel and felt it would make a valuable addition to Pinewood Park, with the potential for a neighborhood loop trail and the protection of wetlands on the site. Hans Nedde added that the parcel contains phragmites and other invasive species in the wetland area, and that acquisition would give the town the opportunity to treat those invasives. Cheryl Van Eps, attending remotely, noted that the bridge footings at the small creek crossing are being eroded by water, with erosion worsening after heavy storms.

Ken Signorello asked whether Parks and Recreation would be leading the process of running the applications through, and Harlan Smith confirmed that Parks and Recreation would be driving the process.

CARRIE MACFARLANE made a motion, seconded by SARAH SALATINO, to authorize Ken Signorello to prepare the application for the use of Conservation Reserve Funds to cover legal fees for the donation of a parcel at 33 Windridge Road to the Town of Essex. Motion passed 8-0.

6d. Update and Discussion on Trail Naming Process (00:51:30)

The committee took up the update and discussion on the trail naming process. Duane Millar Barlow presented the Trail Naming Procedure, a draft policy developed in response to feedback received following the trail naming exercise at the previous meeting.

Millar Barlow explained that the procedure clarifies the authority of the Conservation and Trails Committee: the committee does not have the authority to name trails itself, but rather develops candidate names through a process that may include surveys and neighborhood outreach, then transmits a recommendation to the Parks and Recreation Department. Parks

DRAFT

and Recreation would in turn propose those names to the Select Board, with the committee's recommendation attached, for final approval. The procedure includes guidelines around naming, such as avoiding names of individuals and subdivision branding, and weighting existing names already in use. The timeline outlined in the procedure calls for a naming cycle to open two meetings before the vote, with a survey period, followed by a meeting at which the committee confirms the final vote is scheduled for the next meeting, and then a final vote.

Carrie Macfarlane noted that one area needing adjustment was the survey duration, which in the written draft stated 30 days but which she suggested should be two weeks. She raised the concern that two weeks might not provide sufficient time for community input, while also noting the importance of getting trail maps finalized and trails publicized so more residents could find and use them.

Ken Signorello suggested that detailed discussion about changes to the procedure be deferred to the next meeting, when the committee could act on it, and asked members to review the document carefully and come prepared with proposed revisions. Millar Barlow agreed, adding that the committee should be mindful of not creating a more burdensome process for trail naming than exists for other town matters with greater impact on residents, and that a 90-day process would not strike the right balance.

Harlan Smith noted that during the previous survey, multiple partners helped distribute it, including the town and Parks and Recreation through their social media channels. Smith expressed support for Cheryl Van Eps's suggestion of placing a sign or notice with a QR code directly on trails that are upcoming for naming, so that regular trail users would be directly informed and could participate in the survey. The chair agreed the idea could be very useful, though noted that seasonal variation in trail use could affect the number of responses depending on when a naming cycle begins.

Hans Nedde noted that future trail naming would be grouped together with preliminary mapping and formal adoption of trails, brought to the Select Board as a single package, and that some trails may require additional time due to easement acquisition or trail reroutes before a name can formally go to the Select Board.

Cheryl Van Eps, participating remotely, thanked the committee for developing the procedure, describing it as an example of responsive government. Van Eps offered several suggestions: placing hard-copy notices directly on trails to capture users' attention and link them to the survey; making use of email distribution lists for Lang Farms and Pinewood Manor neighborhoods; sending repeated notices given that summer is a busy time for residents; and encouraging the town to develop a communications toolbox so boards and commissions do not have to reinvent outreach methods each time. Van Eps also noted that a trail in Lang Farms runs through a dense wooded area and suggested that the name Bumblebee Trail,

DRAFT

approved at the previous meeting, may be a misnomer, as it evokes a meadow with wildflowers rather than the wooded character of the trail. She suggested that the names used by neighbors who have been using the trails for decades would be worth consulting, and offered Pinewood Park Trail as an example of a name already in long use in her neighborhood.

Smith clarified that the pink flags Van Eps observed along the Lang Farms trail are for a planned crushed stone trail improvement project, undertaken in partnership with the Center of Technology for Essex, intended to connect two existing bike paths through that corridor, with work expected to begin in the fall and potentially continue into the following spring.

Following Van Eps's comments, Millar Barlow raised the question of whether the committee wished to rescind or reconsider the trail name recommendations transmitted to Parks and Recreation at the July 14, 2026 meeting.

DUANE MILLAR BARLOW made a motion, seconded by BERT BECHARD, to reconsider the trail name recommendations transmitted by the Conservation and Trails Committee to the Parks and Recreation Department on July 14, 2026. Motion failed 0-8.

During discussion preceding the vote, several members expressed the view that the committee had conducted a reasonable process, that the names were based on community survey responses, and that additional opportunities exist for public comment at both the Parks and Recreation and Select Board levels. Members also noted that rescinding the names and reopening the process could set a precedent for repeated reconsideration in future naming cycles.

Following the vote, the chair noted that the Trail Naming Procedure would be placed on the next meeting agenda for formal adoption, after which it would be transmitted to the Select Board for approval and potential incorporation into the committee's mission statement.

6e. Update on Riverfront Property Purchase (01:20:40)

Bino Cummings introduced this item by noting that he was speaking as a homeowner and member of the homeowners association (HOA) rather than as chair. He reported that the town has made an offer to the HOA, and that the HOA has had to engage legal counsel to ensure the transaction would work, which has been a cost challenge given the HOA's limited funds. He stated that from the HOA's perspective, the town has been moving things along, and that the ball is currently to some degree in the HOA's court. He wanted to be fully transparent with the committee about where things stand, acknowledging that some members have felt the process has moved slowly.

DRAFT

Harlan Smith acknowledged that the process has taken a long time, noting that it may have begun before he joined the town as an employee. He explained that the scope of the negotiation changed over time: originally a small parcel was under consideration, but the town needed to investigate several options and conduct due diligence to ensure the parcel could be permitted in the way the town intended to develop it. He noted that the town reached out to the state extensively, and that there were many parties involved in the early stages before the town settled on a smaller, less complicated parcel. He agreed with Cummings that the current stumbling block lies with the HOA, and that the town is trying to help where it can while continuing communications. He expressed hope that there would be something to announce soon, including possibly getting something in writing.

In response to a question from Bert Bechard, Cummings described the location of the parcel as being on the River Road side of Route 289. He explained that it is a smaller triangular-shaped piece just to the west of a grassy field with shipping containers, owned by an HOA that also owns parkland across the street. Cummings noted that the goal is to establish the parcel as a river access point for canoes, kayaks, and paddleboards, which the town currently lacks, with possible future additions such as pollinator gardens, though water access remains the primary objective.

DRAFT

7a. Reading File – Committee Member Comments (01:25:18)

Ken Signorello reminded the chair and vice chair about the Second Saturday meetings, describing them as useful opportunities to speak directly with the Select Board and raise topics such as the Riverside parcel. He also noted that the committee has a pending updated mission statement that was submitted approximately a year and a half ago, and that after being referred to staff it had not been heard from since.

Erin De Vries reported attending a recent Second Saturday meeting, where she raised the Riverside parcel, the trail naming work, and the upcoming tree management plan discussion. She noted that Select Board members Shannon and Ethan were present, along with several members of the Housing Commission and Economic Development, and that the experience was informative. She did not have an opportunity to raise the question of the committee's mission statement but noted it as a topic for a future visit.

Erin De Vries reported that as of August 4th, the Scott administration and the Agency of Natural Resources had finalized a wetland rule change, despite hundreds of thousands of public comments, including one submitted by the committee in January. The change scrapped a provision that would have allowed home building in unmapped wetlands, but retained a reduction of the wetland buffer size from 50 to 25 feet in villages and downtowns. The Agency of Natural Resources stated that the buffer reduction would free up approximately 2,000 acres of additional developable land within designated areas statewide. The oversight panel had rejected the rulemaking changes multiple times on the grounds that they defied legislative intent and separation of powers, but the Agency of Natural Resources moved forward despite lawmakers' objections. As part of an agreement reached with Let's Build Homes, the Lake Champlain Committee, the Vermont Natural Resource Council, and other groups that had threatened to sue, the Agency of Natural Resources committed to mapping more of the state's wetlands over the long term and to creating a simplified permit process for home building within 26 to 50 feet of a wetland, which would require developers to register with the state before starting construction.

7b. Reading File – CTC Development Review Checklist (01:29:52)

The chair noted that the reading file included the CTC Development Review Checklist. He explained that while no development review board referrals had come before the committee that evening, he intended to refer to the checklist going forward when conducting DRB reviews, in hopes of streamlining a process that he acknowledged can take a significant amount of time.

8. Adjourn (01:30:17)

KEN SIGNORELLO made a motion, seconded by PAUL DAVIS, to adjourn. Motion passed 8-0.

DRAFT