

Boyce Hill Town Forest Steering Committee
Minutes
September 15, 2020 – 5 pm

Present via Zoom:

Lisa Koitzsch, Corrie Miller, Chuck Martel, Liza Walker, Caitlin Cusack, Peter Colgan, Woody Dugan, Karrie Thomas, and Sally Dwyer

1. Introductions

Each Steering Committee (SC) member introduced themselves, including background and skills related to the Boyce Hill Town Forest (BHTF) management planning.

2. Review of meeting scope and general details

- a. Gratitude expressed for the gift of land to the Town of Fayston (Town)
- b. Brief history of the land transfer including the Select Board (SB) directive that the Conservation Commission (FCC) direct the management plan for the property.
- c. Overview of Interim Plan – started with restrictions to learn from use during Interim period and consider reducing restrictions
- d. Decision points: SC, FCC, SB
- e. Draft Management Plan to be approved by SB in order for it to be determined Final

3. SC ‘Mission’

- a. Guided by Vermont Land Trust (VLT) Conservation Easement (Easement)
 - i. Conserve Natural Resources
 - ii. Provide an open and inclusive management planning process
- b. Help public transition to community-owned parcel
 - i. Embracing some changes proves to be challenging for those close to the property for decades
 - ii. Listen to great diversity of opinions, record
 - iii. Consider the best way to accommodate and balance this diversity

4. Status Update

- a. Funding:
 - i. Conservation Reserve Fund – acquisition of land and/or easement but not management
 - ii. Town Forest Reserve Fund – Fund established at Town Meeting 2020 for management and stewardship of BHTF and Chase Brook TF. Donations could be earmarked for individual town forests.
 - iii. BHTF Management Planning Process estimated at \$15,000-\$20,000 depending on expertise needed. FCC asked for \$7,500 and \$3,500 was allocated in 2020 Town budget and approved by Town. Hoping for additional funds in 2021 but looking to private donations, grants, and fundraisers as well. Alternatively, the process may take longer and be less inclusive.
 - iv. Sally asked about the possibility of an endowment fund for BHTF. Discussion about this and about the Town Forest Reserve Fund. Chuck stated the Town could pursue an endowment if that is an avenue it would want to pursue. Agreement that BHTF management funds not be subjected to an annual vote or as part of a line item in the budget but rather as dedicated funds in the Reserve Fund. Numerous ideas floated for fundraising ideas with the caveat of not inhibiting public use of the property with private paid events.

b. Phase I – Learning

i. Natural Resources – Review of accomplishments thus far in 2020

1. Natural Resources Inventory – Dubois & King – ongoing (Proposal in Shared folder)
2. Washington Country Forester visit – Dan Singleton (need to invite new County Forester)
3. Grassland bird habitat review – Vermont Center for Ecostudies (VCE) (Email summary in Shared folder)
4. Audubon Vermont – Forest Bird Inventory
5. Invasive Species Report (VLT) – report not received yet.
6. Vernal pool mapping for VCE – to be done
7. Mowing management and mowing alternatives – Lars Brun, Mad River Glen, input from many North Fayston stakeholders
8. Mad Birders breeding bird survey – May 2020
9. VLT Ecological Memo (in Shared Folder)
10. Upcoming visits from VT Fish, Wildlife & Fisheries biologists (we have made contact but it has not been returned)
11. Field walks delayed due to COVID-19 – hoping for winter & Spring

ii. Cultural Resources

1. Vermont Master Naturalist project – three students assigned to BHTF
 - a. Man-made features
 - b. Land-use history: current and past
 - c. Oral history, deed research, ag census
2. Neighboring landowners and land use issues
 - a. Pete asked about emphasis on sugaring in various documents – VLT document created for Town Forests, not a mandate but included in case Town wants to do this type of management in future.
 - b. Mention of Mad River Equities and Bisbee private land between BHTF and Dowsville Headwaters state land and careful consideration needed to encourage TF users to be respectful of private property. Consideration also needed for how to secure long term public access between Town and State lands, wherever it might be feasible. Current focus is on good relations with landowners.

c. Phase 2 – Public Outreach and Input Conversation

- i. Paired with management plan drafting – ensuring opportunities for anyone in Fayston and beyond to weigh in on property values and future interactions. Need to be inclusive to all “user groups.”
- ii. Case studies in Vermont where stakeholders have been omitted in planning process with negative and time consuming results. Therefore, making sure everyone is at the table in the beginning of a process is critical to management plan success. Equity and Inclusion.
- iii. Need for systematic categorizing of public input in order to better record and acknowledge diverse opinions.
- iv. Phase 1 process delayed this Spring due to COVID and some unexpected public input.
- v. [Town Forest Recreational Planning Toolkit](#) – available from the State of Vermont. Ways of working through a management planning process for a Town Forest. To be explored to see what might be useful to our process.

- vi. Hope to hire a third-party facilitator for public process and conversation. Also hope to hire someone to help draft the management plan. Funding dependent.

5. Meeting Schedules

- a. Twice a month – evenings preferred, not before 5pm. 1 ½ hours.
- b. Wednesdays (1st and 3rd) and Mondays preferred.
- c. Monday, September 21st at 7:00 pm – next meeting.
- d. Wednesday, October 7th at 7:00 pm.
- e. Pete suggested an in-person visit to the property by the SC. Date and time in October to be decided.
- f. Public meetings – need to be warned and minutes will be posted on Town website. Public will be able to comment at the start of the meetings but our focus now needs to be on getting the committee up and running.

6. Interim Management – run through agenda items. Details to be discussed at next meeting.

- a. Pond embankment – maintenance needed
- b. Misuse: fishing, motorized vehicles, open fires, dogs off leash.
- c. Active management: items to be addressed in the short term.
- d. Private property – interaction with neighbors and property boundaries.
- e. System of tracking public input and timeline for long term management process.
- f. Commercial use: Not allowed unless a special permit is issued.
 - i. Icelandic Horse Farm issue – no horses allowed in Interim Plan but more investigation needed for final plan. SC recommendation is posted in shared Google Drive folder.
 - ii. Need to develop a permitting process – SB tasked SC to work on this as a priority.

7. Next Steps

- a. Corrie and Lisa will meet with Sally to mind dump a to-do list.
- b. Karrie – understanding the scope and digging deeper into everything would be helpful in bringing the group up to speed. Useful to know what has transpired so that SC members can offer to help in specific situations.
- c. Corrie - need committee's help to develop the overall process and the plan.
- d. Woody – synthesizing and sharing community input with the group will help balance forward process with natural resources.
- e. Pete – Long range planning and timeline will help. SC expertise and assignment of tasks will make things more efficient.

NEXT MEETING IS MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21 AT 7:00 PM.