

Fayston Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes
November 29, 2023, 5:45 - 7:30 pm
Fayston Municipal Office

Members Present: Brian Litmans, Andrea Henderson, Amy Dalton, Pete Colgan, Woody Dugan, Corrie Miller, Patty Pasley
Public/Guests: Ira Shadis, Friends of the Mad River

1. Minutes Approved

Andrea moved to approve minutes with comments from October 25, 2023. Corrie seconded. Comments / suggested edits reviewed and incorporated into draft minutes. Andrea, Brian, Pete, Woody, and Corrie voted in favor and the motion was approved. Amy was not present for the vote, and Patty abstained, as not present at the previous meeting.

2. No public input noted.

3. 2024 Budget

- Budget subcommittee will be formed for next year's budget process.
- Reviewed draft FCC and Reserve Fund budget line items, as well as ARPA funded projects. Recommended we draw approximately \$5k from Town Forest Reserve to maintain a \$30k fund balance.
- Budget meeting with Selectboard is December 5th at 5:30 pm.
- Some FCC members plan to attend.
- Last year's budget requests were smaller as the town budget was tight and the decision was made to draw from Town Forest Reserve for Boyce expenses instead of add to budget request.
- Conservation Reserve Fund request for 2023 was \$5,000, and Selectboard funded \$3,500.
- With Boyce Hill Management Plan in place, FCC's request to the Selectboard is more substantial this year
- Establishment and funding/building of Conservation, Town Forest, and Invasive Reserve Funds is important to ensure savings can grow year to year and are available as local match for grants, to demonstrate the town's investment in conservation, and land acquisition utilizing the Conservation Reserve Fund when opportunities arise, especially with increased development.
- This year's budget request is based on the idea that keeping a minimum of \$30k in Town Forest Reserve Fund is best practice to accommodate unanticipated expenses and weather fiscally tight years; current balance is \$35k.
- Corrie motioned to approve FCC and Reserve Fund budget requests totalling \$33,200, Patty seconded. All in favor and motion approved.

4. Friends of the Mad River

Ira Shadis, Executive Director, Friends of the Mad River, shared overview document prepared for FCC.

- Friends works with CCs, USFW, towns, individuals with an emphasis on the watershed
 - Luke Foley, Climate and Engagement Manager
 - Onome Ofoman, Watershed Engagement Coordinator
- Ridge to River 2.0 - address climate resilience; learn, plan, take action
- Mad River Watch - approximately 25 volunteers manage sampling sites
 - Revamping for more meaningful data
 - E. coli is always higher after a storm
 - Connectivity - salt content, more salt being used due to increased number of freeze/thaw events in winter, and dust control in summer
- Storm Smart - free home-site assessment program to 'spongify' the MRV
- Storm Water Master Plans
 - Three for Fayston with nine products
 - Projects well positioned for State of VT clean water funding
- Restoration Planning & Action
- Technical Assistance & Conservation Planning / Facilitation
- Latest Climate & Ecology Expert Series event - Floodplains Workshop on 11/18 led by Ned Swanberg, Floodplain Manager, Vermont DEC
- Potential collaboration with FCC
 - Stormwater plans
 - Lockwood Brook
 - Safeguarding wildlife connectivity project - \$8,000 ARPA funding
 - Road crew roundtable - last held one focused on knotweed management at Fayston Municipal Office several years ago; opportunity to repeat

5. Phen Basin

Corrie shared historical overview of Phen Basin:

- Phen Basin purchased and conserved in 1995 by Trust for Public Land.
 - Sweet Water Trust, a fund focused on wilderness protection but now dissolved, originally helped conserve the land
 - Easement identified an Ecological Protection Zone (EPZ)
 - Land transferred to state with easement held by VT Land Trust
 - Extensive bear and deer habitat and songbird value
- Trail proposed by Mad River Riders (MRR) through EPZ in 2019
 - Friends of the Mad River, FCC, and the Fayston Selectboard were concerned about the potential impact of the new trail on the ecological resources in Phen and its value to the community as a place of solace with few visitors
 - Many groups, including FCC, took a field trip in Jan 2021 with Bob Kogut and Jon Atkinson from Mad River Riders to hear each others' perspectives

- Conversations evolved (alongside the Conservation & Recreation Visioning project) and MRR informally agreed not to pursue new trails in Phen Basin during the CRV project.
- 2021 VT Dept Forest Parks & Rec (FPR) published their management plan for the Camels Hump Unit, which includes Phen Basin.
 - FCC has taken the stance that the values articulated in the conservation easement weren't fully represented in the management plan, particularly as it references new bike trails within the ecological protection zone
 - FCC and Friends of the Mad River have had various conversations with FPR staff and with VLT advocating for stronger ecological protections in management plan. VLT & FPR have new leadership since the last of these conversations and it likely makes sense to reconnect.

6. Conservation & Recreation Visioning

Corrie and Ira provided updates as co-chairs of the Ecological Integrity Working Group about the goals, structure, and processes of the CRV Steering Committee and working groups

- Community Learning Session - December 7th @ Valley Players Theater 6-8 pm with Gus Goodwin, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and Drew Pollak-Bruce, CRO Planning & Design

7. Project updates

a. Knotweed – Andrea

- Knotweed on drying racks at Barton Road taken to KW dump 11/7 and 8 and four pallets back to McCullough barn. (Thank you, Patty!)
- Met with Curt and Jito 10/23 to discuss next year's KW efforts, collaboration, recognition of volunteers, interns, etc.
- Knotweed All-Stars article in 11/16 VR to recognize volunteers.
<https://www.valleyreporter.com/index.php/news/local-news/18463-tri-town-conservation-commissioners-honor-volunteers>
- Joined WCC 11/4 for tree planting at Lareau, Austin, Tardy parcels and Friends of the Mad River for Floodplains Workshop 11/18.
- Potential collaboration with Friends for tree planting in Fayston in areas post KW management (i.e. Mill Brook / German Flats area).

b. Conservation & Recreation Visioning – Corrie

- Mark calendars for first CRV Community Learning Session on Thurs, Dec 7, from 6-8 pm at Valley Players Theater. Speakers are Gus Goodwin, Senior Conservation Planner, The Nature Conservancy (VT Chapter), and Drew Pollak-Bruce, Owner + Founder, CRO Planning and Design.

c. Boyce Hill – Pete & Woody

- Completed work weekend 10/28-29 focusing on viewshed tree removal along artificial channel. Engaged about 15 volunteers.
- Working through copy and map info to be included on kiosk. Stuck on what to call the main road. Have reached out to Abenaki Nation for engagement on land acknowledgement and access to the land.
- Seeking members to join Boyce Hill Committee. One strong candidate thus far.
- Developed draft budget for FCC review before selectboard presentation.
- Invasive species management: Multiflora Rose removed by excavation at four locations.

d. Chase Brook – Patty/Andrea

- Picnic tables put away. (Thanks, Andrea!)
- Garbage can removed for the winter.
- Bridge over the brook has broken railing and fencing. Currently in hands of Bob Hogan (Mad River Riders) to fix.
- Andrea met with Bee the Change, and they are committed to building a pollinator garden in the spring at the trailhead

e. MRV Bear Initiative – Amy

The Great Amazing Bear Story Contest is live on the Mad River Valley webpage:

<https://www.madrivervalley.com/stewardmrv/living-with-bears/5-great-amazing-bear-contest/>

f. Other - Updated Chase Brook Management Plan – Amy

- Contacted Brian Sweet (forester who worked on original plan for Chase Brook Town Forest Management Plan) on 11/10. He no longer does this work but referred Amy to other consulting companies in the area. Spoke with Michael Brown with Birdseye Consulting. He's nearing completion on the Moretown Town Forest Management Plan. He conveyed that when working with a consulting company, they either provide support for mapping and other technical aspects or assume all related work. Ballpark cost estimate for partial work: \$1200. Amy has not yet received an estimate for comprehensive consulting work. He would be available Spring 2024. Emailed Robert Nelson, Washington County forester. Sent him the current management plan for review. As a State of Vermont employee, his services would be at no cost to the town. If the Conservation Commission needs the FMP done sooner, we could choose to hire a consulting forester. If Robert does the FMP update, he would probably ask the town for some \$ to hire some mapping services. Amy will be meeting with Robert on 12/18 to learn more about process, timelines, and more details re: options for updating this

plan. Emailed Julie Frost, a friend who is working on her master's in Science in Environment and Natural Resources. She has expressed an interest in supporting our efforts to update this plan.

8. **Next Meeting:** Wednesday, January 24, 2024, 5:45 - 7:00 pm at Fayston Municipal Office; December meeting canceled.

Motion to Adjourn at 7:20pm by Patty. Amy seconded. All voted in favor.



HEALTHY LAND. CLEAN WATER. VIBRANT COMMUNITY.

Friends of the Mad River Overview for Fayston Conservation Commission - 11/29/2023

Mission: Friends of the Mad River (Friends) is a member-supported, nonprofit organization, founded in 1990. Friends is dedicated to stewarding the Mad River Valley's healthy land and clean water for our community and for future generations. We build diverse partnerships of neighbors, businesses, towns, and other organizations to restore and enhance the watershed's valued resources. Together, we learn about the health of the land and water; conserve our natural resources; and celebrate this special place. Our work is grounded in sound science, inclusive education and engagement, and thoughtful action.

Background: Friends has been involved in a wide range of efforts since the organization started in 1990, from our longstanding Mad River Watch program to supporting the conservation of particular parcels (like Warren Falls). As a watershed group, our geographic focus spans major areas of Warren, Waitsfield, Fayston, Moretown, and some of Duxbury – though we do partner with larger regional groups like VT DEC or the USFS. We are often the go-to conservation group for this community and, when not directly leading projects ourselves, play a key role as a convener and facilitator of broad conservation efforts. While we do have a strong focus on the Mad River and its tributaries, we recognize that the interconnected nature of our ecosystems means we need to think about larger systems if we want to be effective as stewards of the watershed for the long haul.

Current Work: We have a number of ongoing programs, projects, and collaborative initiatives.

- **Ridge to River 2.0:** A cross town collaborative effort to learn, plan, and take action around climate change and climate resilience. Emerged from R2R 1.0 which focused more narrowly on stormwater and flood resilience.
- **Mad River Watch:** A volunteer-driven program that collects quantitative and qualitative data about the health of the watershed. The program was historically focused on the summer months and on lab analysis of water samples. Over the next few years we will continue to review methodologies and experiment with collecting different kinds of data.
- **Ridge to River 1.0:** The work of the original R2R coalition continues under the auspices of the broader climate umbrella, as well as in two established initiatives:
 - **Storm Smart:** A home-site assessment program that emerged from R2R 1.0 that offers free consultation and aims to 'spongify' the MRV one property at a time.
 - **Storm Water Master Plans:** Stormwater management projects were identified for all five towns, some received preliminary design work. These projects are well positioned for state of VT clean water funding.
- **Restoration Planning & Action:** Planning and project scoping for natural resource and river function restoration projects with regional partners like CVRPC, Audubon VT, etc. Potential projects include culvert replacements, berm removal, riparian buffer restoration, floodplain reconnection, or establishing river corridor easements (Friends does not hold easements).
- **Technical Assistance & Conservation Planning / Facilitation:** Leadership on broad conservation initiatives in the MRV, including the conservation recreation visioning project & wetland planning in Irasville. Technical assistance to towns and groups, including the new rec hub and town owned lands.

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