

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

DRAFT Minutes of Tuesday, January 12, 2021

In attendance: Cristine Hammer, Chair; Alan Botula, Vice Chair; Diana Wood, Clerk; Casey Clark; Hilary Jones; Grace Vinson

Town Staff present: Darren Schibler, Town Planner; Chuck Vile, Tree Warden

Others present: Mike Spaeder (Trail Caretaker), Patrick Grant and Jonathan Rowe (Heritage Tree Care), Madeline McHose (Essex Parks & Recreation)

Hammer Called the meeting to order 6:35pm

Agenda Item #1 - Public Comments

There were no public comments.

Agenda Item #2 - Agenda Changes and Approval

Schibler proposed adding a brief discussion on trail mapping with Madeline McHose after #4.

JONES made a motion, seconded by VINSON, to approve the amended agenda. The motion passed 6-0.

Agenda Item #3 - Town Meeting Annual Report

Wood made a motion, seconded by BOTULA, to approve the Conservation and Trails Committee Annual Report as written. The motion passed 6-0.

Agenda Item #4 - Emerald Ash Borer Management Efforts

Schibler introduces Patrick and Jonathan from Heritage Tree. They have provided information about how to treat for EAB. Schibler also reached out to other agencies and town. Additional info is in the packets.

Patrick is the Owner, Jonathan is a Tree Care specialist.

Patrick notes the they are not fully endorsing the SLAM program. believing it to be focused on slowing the spread of the EAB, but it might not be best to preserve individual trees.

Other tactics include girdling and trapping.

Jonathan's info is based on 3rd party universities. Following instructions on pesticides the results are 99% effective, but SLAM may not be as effective as that.

Benefits of selecting specimen trees, that way you can guarantee their survival by investing in those specific trees.

SLAM can extend treatment windows. Challenges of monitoring EAB infection. Having a controlled program might be better.

Hammer asks about treatment of the selected trees. Clarified that it is every 2-3 years. Hammer also asks about determining specimen trees. Jonathan explains the location is important, community benefits, tree health, soils and more.

Schibler notes that our Tree inventory is not that detailed. We can go back to add info. Botula asks if Vile can assist that. Hammer continues that we can begin with our initial report.

Clark asks if we are intending on treating trees in better health and serve the community best. Jonathan explains that yes. Using the product on a health tree will garner the best results.

Hammer clarifies the costs, would we treat all selected trees in one year, or split them up. Botula suggested splitting the trees so 50% are treated in a given year. Jonathan confirms that treating the same trees every 2 years.

Hammer asked about cost per tree. Schibler confirms that yes, for all our selected tree costs are \$8-\$10/inch diameter. More if there is an active infestation. Example: small tree \$50, up to \$225 for a large tree. Average \$100 per tree, per injection, every 2 years.

Patrick notes that they would do an additional evaluation of the trees included in the plan, that's in addition to Essex evaluation.

Schibler notes that public outreach is important. To inform community members of the injection plan, and that we plan to replace trees.

Botula asks about timing of treatment. Jonathan explains that May to October is good, but sooner is better. Botula continues that this should be made a priority in the spring. Hammer says that we should plan our systematic approach by early spring.

Schibler add that we should continue to explore tree removals and planting. Removals in 2021, and planting in Spring 2022.

Jones asks if Public Works is up to date on this. Schibler clarifies that contractors have been used and that is plan going forward, but utilizing Public Works could be utilized for cost savings, depending on their workload.

Clark asks about any down sides to the injection. Jonathan clarifies that any alternative options would be an organic botanical (such as Neem oil but that's not proven to work well on EAB), but the injections are by far the safest options because it stays within the tree and doesn't leach into the environment.

Schibler add that plantings are planned for the spring. Contractor could offer a guarantee for trees, but we do have trees set aside already. Hammer asks about the guarantees with a contract. Schibler explains that he can get more info to talk about next meeting.

Agenda Item #5 - trail mapping

McHose (who works for the joint recreation departments), has been working on mapping our trails, particularly on Mathieu Town Forest, Birchwood Manor, Foster Road, Forestdale Natural Area and others that all connect, as well as Indian Brook's outer trails and more. They have made some updates to the website, but more are needed. CTC can help get easements or purchase additional properties to complete our trail systems.

Botula asks about Woodside, but McHose notes that land is property of Winooski Valley Park District.

McHose prioritizes Mathieu Town Forest. Town-owned parcels and easements need to be confirmed. The sections off of Tanglewood Dr, need work. There are existing trails. Botula ask who is responsible for negotiation. Schibler explains the most of the work is done at the time of development, But after the fact CTC can reach out them, with the additional of town staff support. Parks capital and Conservation Reserve Funds could be used to purchase easements or land.

Hammer asks bout liability issues for landowners. Schibler explains that adding the easement REDUCES liability to landowners.

Botula ask how we get this going. How can CTC help? After further discussion, it is clear that CTC can help request trail easements from the landowners.

Hammer asks about the disc golf near the Foster Road School. McHose explains that it was Eagle Scout project that went through the school directly, since all were under the impression that the property was owned by the school.

Schibler further explains that at one point there was proposed exit of the Circ highway at Allen Martin Parkway, with possible development, but the land might not be feasibly developable.

McHose will continue to update the rough maps.

Schibler asks about Saxon Hill, and notes that section should be prioritized since we have had public process and a developed management plan. To be placed ahead of Indian Brook. Managing the informal trails is important support all the uses: hiking, biking, dog walking etc.

McHose asks about the sand extraction process and how long that will be. Schibler explains that it began around 2017 and once it is done and restored, the land reverts to the town. McHose ask for clarification of creating maps that exclude the industrial areas. Schibler confirms, yes. Knowing trails in the area can help with future easements on these parcels.

McHose follows up with website updates that we need to provide details since that might need to be linked to the Experience Essex portions of the town site.

Botula suggests we move the discussion on website updates offline and provide an update to the group later.

Agenda Item #6 - Development Review

Schibler presents a project 131 Red Pine Circle, which was originally approved for trucking facility and will now be a glass recycling facility taking up 2 lots. Concerns CTC because of the easement along the boundary. Currently not much of trail. This would just shift the access point to a different lot boundary. CTC is fine with it.

Consent agenda item on Lost Nation Rd parcel swap. No trails or significant wildlife connections. Also fine with CTC.

39 Essex Way (Links at Lang Farm) 3 acre portion for subdivision. potential commercial development. Wood notes that adding natural opportunities and wider trails would be nice.

Parcel off Towers Rd. includes plans for four new dwellings. They propose one drive to serve the homes. Lots of wetlands at the front of the property. Scenic district allows for flexibility with lot frontage. The length of the drive is concerning. Hammer asks about acres per lot. Schibler explains that it's roughly 2 acres for each. One section may be mapped as wildlife corridor. CTC shares concerns about wildlife access and concern about incremental development.

Agenda Item #7 - Work Plan & Calendar Review

Hammer proposed we move this to the front of the agenda for next meeting. Members present agree.

Wood volunteered to attend the January 28 Planning Commission meeting if needed to speak about 39 Essex Way.

Agenda Item #8 - Minutes

BOTULA made a motion, seconded by JONES, to accept the minutes from December 10, 2020. The motion passed 6-0.

Agenda Item #9 - Reading File

We could apply to become a member of the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions (AVCC). We would need a quorum and funding for that. We will discuss at next meeting.

Jericho and Underhill reached out about beaver management at Mills Riverside Park.

UVM Field Naturalist Program and Rubenstein Capstone is looking for projects to assist with. Keep them in mind for future ideas.

Tree City USA virtual conference in mid-February.

VTRANS small scale bike and pedestrian grants are available. Could help foster connectivity between Town and Village. Mostly for construction.

The meeting adjourned at 8:42PM.