

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

Draft minutes Tuesday 3/8/2022

Members Attending: Alan Botula Chair, Mike Spaeder Vice Chair, Lauren Gaffney Cohen, Shannon Jackson, Betsy Dunn Clerk. Rusty Brink, Erin DeVries, Ken Signorello, Steve Dowd, Staff: Darren Schibler, Planner; Chuck Vile Tree Warden

Members absent: None

Members of the public attending: Lee Ann Smith Teacher at Essex HS in The STEM academy.

Meeting called to order by Alan Botula at 6:30 pm

Agenda Item 1. Public to be heard

MS Smith explained her project for the students in the STEM Academy to help prevent erosion and to mitigate stormwater run off in Indian Brook Park. She has ordered 100 trees for planting. She has 50 root ball Dogwood shrubs approximately 4-5 feet tall and Another 50 that are smaller approximately 2-foot live stake.

She would like to plant them on May 23rd midday. She is asking for our help in the planting and potentially getting more interested parties involved. Chuck Vile will go with the group to insure proper planting of the trees along the reservoir. the sites have already been chosen.

If interested she can be reached at lsmith@ESWD.org. we will put this on social media: FPF, FB Essex community page, the Reporter and the Retorter. Steve Dowd will reach out the CTE forestry program and solicit their help as well.

Agenda Item 2. Approval / Changes

Ken suggested changing the order of business for the meeting based on Roberts Rules of Order. It makes more sense to ask if there are changes to the agenda prior to the first item. Ken made a motion, seconded by Shannon, to move Agenda Changes and Approval to the first order of business for future meetings. The motion passed 7-1-1 (Botula dissenting, Spaeder abstaining).

Agenda Item 3. Minutes

Rusty made a motion to approve the minutes and it was seconded by Steve, the motion passed 9/0

Agenda Item 4. Essex Tree policy

The policy needed some fine tuning with word smithing. Each change was voted on individually. And after these eight word /phase changes were made, Alan made a motion to accept the tree policy as amended. Mike seconded the motion, and the motion passed 9/0.

Of note, this is the final step for the committee to apply for the designation of Tee City USA. And ultimately have the Selectboard approve.

Agenda Item 5. Discussion of Dogs off leash in town parks

Betsy Presented the conversation she had with Ally Vile, director of the Essex Parks and Recreation Dept. and Darren Schibler Staff support for the CTC.

Ally would like to the frame the meeting as a community conversation, vs. a forum She would like to take small steps in reaching a conclusion.

1. A long-term vision: Voice and Sight training Program for dog owners. A more incentive-based approach to encourage good dog control etiquette. In the long run this could be used to determine which dogs could be off leash or not. This may be hard to enforce.
2. A group walk at Indian Brook with Robert Kissinger of the K9 unit along with an officer from animal control and Chief Hoague. This would be an opportunity to walk and talk about dog behaviors
3. Have a public forum with a paid moderator to facilitate

The committee discussed all these options trainings are free and available. When a dog is off leash, it must take voice commands. Steve suggested having the information reviewed by the Parks and Recreation dept and when passes to Indian Brook are bought, as well as when people enter the park, they are reminded that their dogs must be under their control. We will also make a list of actionable items to help deal with this very sensitive subject.

Agenda Item 6. Proposal on Lymantria dispar Moths

Ken spoke on this subject. These were previously called Gypsy Moths that has been changed to Spongy moths. This is a residential issue. Many of the trees have egg masses that will soon hatch and play havoc with our trees. Ken has spoken with Ethan Tapper Chittenden County Forester about the issue. Ethan has said there will be no spraying this year by the state. They discussed the option of meeting with the Homeowners Associations (HOA's) and teaching them how to deal with the egg masses. We are not talking about chemical applications. Steve suggested a post card could be sent out describing the steps to take as well. A motion was made by Shannon to have Ken speak with the HOA's and teach them the proper methods of pest control. Seconded by Betsy. The motion passed 9/0

Agenda Item 7. Work plan organization

The whole committee had the opportunity to rate the items in order of importance. Alan explained that at the top of the list of things to do many were projects that were already

committed to and would not be included in the prioritization of the list. Some items were taken off the list due to jurisdictional issues: paths on RT 289, Pollinator plantings on RT289. And we moved all the invasives into one item.

The real question was how many projects we can do in one year. Erin suggested no more than 5, and we need a balance on easy and those that require more hands-on work. Possibly use the Eisenhower Matrix to make the decision.

We took each project one by one and discussed them.

- 1. Trail mapping.** Ken will be lead on this project working with Steve. They will communicate with Shannon Lunderville at the town offices to loop her in on their work. In Essex we have an excellent resource in Gary Smith who understands and used GIS in his work. Betsy made a motion to all Ken to seek outside resources for this work Mike seconded it. The motion passed 9/0
- 2. Trees for Streams.** Chuck will work with Betsy, Ally Vile and Annie Costandi Director of Stormwater Operations. They will walk the trails and analyze the trail's clearing and tread and note all problem areas in May.
- 3. Saxon Hill Management Plan.** Lauren will be lead on this with Shannon as co-lead, working with staff once Parks & Recreation is back at capacity. The Fellowship of The Wheel (FOTW) has received an Enhancement Recreation Stewardship and Access (ERSA) grant that fully funds accessibility upgrades to existing trails. Which is a Federal recreational trails program.
- 4. Recruit trail caretakers.** Betsy will be lead on this, with Mike's help. Ally and Darren have a list of current trail caretakers. Some may no longer be active in their role We will check who are active and recruit where needed.
- 5. Water Quality.** Erin will take lead on this. She has several resources. Trees for streams is a Federal program US fish and Wildlife Service. Betsy also offered to speak to a friend that has access to graduate students in this arena.
- 6. Conservation Fund.** Rusty will take lead here. He is looking for 10 individuals/businesses that would fund some of projects. He has already spoken to 5. He wants to craft a message that highlights the type of projects we are undertaking and show them that this is how their money will be used
- 7. Pollinators.** Betsy will be lead. This will be minimal work for the committee the "Bee The Change" organization will do all the work.
- 8. Management plans for Town Forests.** Betsy has already spoken with Ethan Tapper about developing the management plan for the Mathieu Forest. He said it will be on his back burner as he has already been asked to do several other towns forest for this year.
- 9. Education.** Ken would like to take on a project to educate the homeowners with 25, or greater, acres of land about the Current use program

Agenda Item. 8 Spring clean up

Shannon is point. He reviewed the timeline with the team. He hopes all of us will be there and asked about food for the volunteers. And discussed marketing this to the town and any

pass holders. Signs are ready and he asked if we would post it on our Social media platforms

Agenda Item 9. Adopt-A-Tree

Alan is point. He presented the web site for this program and asked us to look it over. The site is live. There are, however, some things to clean up. Betsy does have the paint for the rock and The Essex Free Library is going to host the painting of rocks. Ken will take pictures of the activity for publication and we launch the program on May 6th. Alan asked Betsy to make a sample rock for the web site.

Agenda Item 10. Other Business

There is a Greening trees grant that Alan proposed he'd write. Darren noted that several requests for zoning amendments had been presented to the Planning Commission, including within the Saxon Hill area. One proposal would involve changing the uses allowed within the industrial sections of the Resource Preservation District – Industrial zone, which would have little if any impact on conservation. The other proposal would swap areas designated for conservation and development, but would provide the town significantly more conservation land. This will require significant review by the Planning Commission and Selectboard, and Darren will inform the CTC when their input is needed. Also, there are development applications on the horizon that the CTC may weigh in on, but nothing that must happen this evening.

Alan made a motion to adjourn at 8:37pm. Mike seconded it. The motion passed 9/0