

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

DRAFT Minutes of Tuesday, August 10, 2021

In attendance: Alan Botula, Chair; Mike Spaeder, Vice Chair; Casey Clark
Town Staff present: Darren Schibler, Town Planner; Chuck Vile, Town Forester
Others: Ken Signorello

AGENDA ITEM #1: Public Comments

Botula called the meeting to order at 6:31 PM, noting that the Committee (CTC) did not have a quorum tonight, so no formal votes or actions would take place. Schibler announced that Grace Vinson had resigned from the CTC since she was moving out of Essex.

Signorello noted that the “gypsy moth” (*Lymantria dispar dispar*, or LDD) population is exploding, and recommended the CTC conduct a survey of egg masses between now and spring 2022. This would help determine which areas are most susceptible to another outbreak, should there be another dry spring, and if spraying of insecticides needed to occur, it could be better targeted. Signorello offered to help organize volunteers to do the survey.

Signorello also expressed interest in joining the CTC, and felt his educational background in forestry could be useful to the group. He noted that his name carries political baggage in the Town, and requested that the CTC express support for his application for a vacancy, if needed. Schibler and Botula agreed Signorello’s background could be useful to the Committee and encouraged him to apply.

Signorello also suggested that the Town establish a nominating committee to help recruit for the many vacant volunteer positions. He also said he could distribute a vacancy advertisement to his personal networks, such as the Vermont Sugarmakers’ Association and the Essex Hunters Facebook group.

AGENDA ITEM #2: Agenda Changes and Approval

There were no changes to the agenda.

AGENDA ITEM #3: Election of Clerk, Recruitment

There were no nominations for Clerk. Schibler noted that Clark was the only member present who was not already an elected officer, but she declined interest in the position. Schibler offered to take minutes for this meeting; Botula suggested that recording duties could rotate between members until a Clerk is elected. Signorello expressed interest in being Clerk, if appointed to the CTC.

AGENDA ITEM #4: Minutes

Minutes were not discussed due to lack of a quorum.

AGENDA ITEM #5: Ash Tree Re-Inventory

Botula stated that he and Vile had completed the ash inventory of the Meadow's Edge neighborhood, finding that most trees had health defects or were located over utility lines, and only a few were potentially worth preserving. He requested that other CTC members tackle other neighborhoods, but first schedule time with Vile to get training on assessing tree health, and to use the scoring rubric he developed, to ensure consistency in the data.

Spaeder stated that he may have sighted emerald ash borer (EAB) while on one of his walks in the woods. Schibler noted that if it was in fact EAB, the Town should act quickly to confirm this and would follow up with Spaeder after the meeting.

Schibler noted that the Town is hosting a training organized through the Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Program (VT UCF) on hazard ash tree removal, which will include a live demonstration on municipal trees (likely at Sand Hill Park).

AGENDA ITEM #6: Trail Mapping Update

Schibler stated that he had reached out to the Parks & Recreation Director and the Trails Coordinator for an update on the trail mapping project, but did not receive a response, noting that this is a busy season for the department. Botula asked if Parks & Recreation could estimate when they would have time to resume this project.

AGENDA ITEM #7: Fall Clean-Up

Botula and Spaeder said that they had chosen Saturday, September 25 from 1:00-3:00pm at Indian Brook Park for the event, which would be entirely focused on trail & drainage maintenance, hopefully involving the Trail Caretakers (and recruiting more). Schibler distributed posters he had prepared for the event. The CTC would not offer snacks this year due to COVID-19. The CTC and Vile agreed to meet on Saturday, August 21 at 9:00am at Indian Brook Park to scope out the work. Publicity will include posters at the park, municipal offices, and other public places; Front Porch Forum, Facebook, direct e-mails to local scout troops, and the Trail Caretakers.

AGENDA ITEM #8: Adopt-a-Tree

Botula reviewed the outline of the program he and Clark had discussed. They noted that there needs to be a public-facing map for adopters to choose eligible trees, possibly using an identification code physically attached to trees (Schibler suggested including a link or QR codes). They suggested that selected trees should have something actionable, such as watering, staking, pruning, and fertilizing for new trees, or for older trees, proper mulching and monitoring for pests or health issues.

Botula wondered if the Town would consider paying for materials used by tree adopters, such as mulch and stakes. Schibler stated that this could be included in a budget request or as a potential use of the Conservation Reserve Fund, particularly for adopters who couldn't afford to personally contribute to the program. Clark suggested that there be a way for people to donate money to the program, and Signorello

suggested that it be a matching contribution to reduce the share paid by the municipality and encourage more donations. Botula and Clark will work with staff on more of the details before the next meeting.

AGENDA ITEM #9: Development Review

1. 44 Brigham Hill Lane

Schibler stated that this was proposed as a 3-lot conventional subdivision in the Conservation (C1) zoning district. Given the area of contiguous / interior forest habitat in the rear of the property, the applicant offered to prohibit live tree cutting east of the power lines, which would be supported by the Town if some dead, downed, or snagged trees were left as well. The Town hopes to encourage the applicant to consider a planned unit development or a shared management plan for the forested area, which would help ensure proper management practices are followed. Signorello and Vile noted that to be eligible for the Current Use Program, a property must have at least 25 acres (27 including the housesite), which would help achieve these goals and also reduce the landowner's property taxes.

2. 108 Center Road / 18 Towers Road

This is a continued sketch plan, now for a 6-lot subdivision, including 4 house lots (2 of which have existing dwellings), one commercial lot with an existing building (the Saab repair shop), and a vacant lot intended for future residential development. As part of the project, the Town is formally establishing the right-of-way for Fleury Road, and may require easements for a shared use path along the former railroad bed and/or along an existing right-of-way along the Essex Square shopping center boundary. No additional comments from the CTC.

3. 22 Corporate Drive

Schibler stated that this was formerly planned to be a new location for Fit2Excel (a gym and physical therapist), but is now proposed as a set of warehouses very similar to other lots on Corporate Drive. The required 200-foot forested buffer is included, and the applicant has taken staff suggestions on using some larger shrubs instead of street trees along the frontage to avoid utility conflicts. No additional comments from the CTC.

AGENDA ITEM #10: Reading File

Schibler pointed out several items in the reading file, including:

- A VT Digger article on public feedback on logging in the Barre Town Forest
- A new grant program from the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation to assist schools with meeting new stormwater requirements for existing sites with 3 or more acres of impervious surfaces.

Botula adjourned the meeting at 8:26 PM.

Minutes submitted by Darren Schibler, Town Planner

Minutes approved October 20, 2021