

Conservation Commission Meeting
Thursday, July 31st, 2008
7pm - Waitsfield Town Office

Members Present: Elizabeth Cadwell, Paul Hartshorn, Phil Huffman, Ted Joslin, Leo Laferriere, Chris Loomis, and Spencer Potter

Guests: Gary Kessler

Leo Laferriere called the meeting to order at 7:05pm

I. Public Input

There was no public input regarding CC projects. Gary Kessler made an appearance on behalf of the Mad River Riders, but his comments are included under Item IV (Wu Ledges) since he is working in conjunction with the town.

II. Commission vacancies

There have not been any appointments to the Commission made by the Select Board. Two vacant seats still need to be filled.

III. Northfield ridgeline parcels

A. Chris Loomis mentioned that it might be wise to create a subcommittee to tackle projects related to these parcels. Leo Laferriere, Phil Huffman, and Chris Loomis were nominated to chair the effort. Spencer Potter made a formal motion to create this subcommittee, and Ted Joslin seconded the motion. All present approved.

B. No decisions have been made about whether to include old parcels in the new Management Plan. The group is still awaiting feedback from the VLT. The Tucker parcel is still up for discussion.

C. There are still unresolved ownership issues surrounding lot 42. It would be helpful for the purposes of access and boundary marking to determine ownership. Leo Laferriere asked the Select Board for input, but they are not convinced that this information is critical. More information is needed. The CC feels that a determination should be made.

Action Item: Ted Joslin and Leo Laferriere will discuss the issue further and readdress the Select Board.

D. Spencer Potter asked whether the Kisel lot is affected by lot 42. Evidently, the Kisel lot is affected because access is limited on other adjoining parcels. The Waitsfield DRB is instrumental in negotiating any agreements pertaining to logging access and trails, so ownership issues may need to be resolved to answer any questions they may have.

E. Ted Joslin wished to know if there have been any appeals regarding taxes on the property with unknown ownership. Phil Huffman suggested he check with Valerie Capels.

Action Item: Ted Joslin will check with Valerie Capels regarding this matter.

F. Copies of all final approvals regarding lot 42 should be reviewed by the CC and included in our booklet. Approvals will be a key factor in determining the CC's ability to operate on the property. The Select Board has the final word in making such determinations.

G. The CC will need to create a game plan for either recreation and/or management uses on each parcel. The VLT easement does not cover the Kisel property, so the CC could

hypothetically begin planning work on this site. Phil Huffman suggested that we be sensitive to the concerns of the Kisel property donors, even when dealing with associated lots.

Action Item: Spencer Potter will obtain a copy of the ? (did I miss something here????) from Valerie Capels.

H. Mark Grosby, although technically not on the CC, continues work on the Ski Valley Acres Piece.

Action Item: Leo Laferriere will contact Mark Grosby and inquire about the status of the Ski Valley Acres project.

IV. Wu Ledges Municipal Forest

A. Audrey Huffman will continue to work on the graphic portion of the trail map as her schedule allows. The Mad River Riders will continue to refine the trail system.

B. Elizabeth Cadwell expressed concern regarding the proximity of some trails to steep ledge. She made a motion to either close these trails or move them away from the edge. Ted Joslin seconded the motion in an effort to encourage discussion. He stated that although the trails may be fine as they are, a conversation was needed. The group did not have any interest in approving the motion; however, it was decided that the group would attempt to provide helpful signage both on the map and on the ground. Ledge is common throughout Vermont and eliminating all risk is nearly impossible. State law helps protect land owners (including municipalities), and the CC recognizes that it is limited in terms of what it can do by both the nature of its volunteer board and the town's budget. It is hoped that the Mad River Riders and town can work together to create a reasonably safe and sensible trail system. Elizabeth remained concerned about safety risks, but accepted the group's offer to include signage and warnings where appropriate and feasible. She stated that although she is not comfortable with the trail as it is, she would be willing to work on an educational overlay highlighting plant communities once the trail system is in place. Phil Huffman suggested using a black diamond rating system to help inform riders of a trail's difficulty, and this was met with enthusiasm by the group.

Action Item: Phil Huffman and Gary Kessler will continue working on the trail system, and will create warning signs for the areas with steep ledge (where feasible.) The Mad River riders will come up with a final design that must be approved by the Select Board.

Action Item: Elizabeth Cadwell will explore ways to highlight/document plant communities located along the trails once the map is in place.

C. Chris Loomis asked if it might make sense to add directional arrows as well. Gary Kessler explained that riders often wish to ride a trail in both directions. The group agreed that it was a good idea to consider this, but decided to postpone making any decisions until ridership numbers are known.

V. Other business

A. Gary Kessler offered insight into insurance issues. He said that his group (the Mad River Riders) can obtain an additional policy for trail-maintenance related issues for \$200 a year. This would run from October to September, regardless of when it was purchased. (So, even if purchased now, it would have to be renewed for another \$200 in October.) He is hoping that some of the smaller biking clubs in Vermont can pull together and obtain a more reasonable coverage quote.

B. McKay Insurance is the company with whom Gary is presently trying to obtain policy coverage. The details are still being discussed. Landowner laws in Vermont do offer some sovereign immunity for towns and town officials.

Action Item: Gary Kessler will continue to explore the options and report back at the next meeting.

C. Phil Huffman asked if the town could support the Mad River Riders in their efforts by offering partial funding for the extra insurance coverage. The CC would like to know how insurance for the town actually works, who is protected, and for what activities? Elizabeth Cadwell suggested that the advice of the town attorney be sought.

Action Item: Ted Joslin will contact the Select Board or Town Attorney regarding this matter.

VI. Minutes

A. Spencer Potter made a motion to approve the Minutes from the June Meeting. Phil Huffman seconded the motion. All Approved.

B. The next meeting will be held on Thursday, August 28th at 7pm.

VII. Update on Community endeavors

A. Phil Huffman offered an update on the Invasive Plants lecture offered by the Vermont Coverts group. He also mentioned that Jamey Fidel will soon contact Phil Huffman and Elizabeth Cadwell to serve on a focus committee aimed at offering forest-related information/educational materials to valley residents.

VIII. Executive Session

A. It was determined that an Executive Session was not needed at this time.

The meeting was adjourned by Leo Laferriere at 8:05pm.