

Town of Waitsfield  
Conservation Commission  
DRAFT Meeting Minutes  
April 19, 2021

Members Present: Phil Huffman-Chair, Bruno Grimaldi-Treasurer, Chris Loomis-Secretary, Bob Cook, Ted Joslin, James Donaldson

Members Absent: Leo Laferriere-Vice Chair, Curt Lindberg

Public in attendance: Christine Sullivan – Selectboard member, Lisa Coyle, Steve Sharp – MRV Backcountry Coalition

Huffman opens the meeting at 6:35

1. Welcomes the MRVTV audience. A round of introductions. Agenda review. No changes to the agenda.
2. Public Input – none
3. Review and approve 3/15 meeting minutes  
MOTION by Grimaldi seconded by Cook to approve the minutes as drafted – MOTION APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.

4. Scrag Mt. Town Forest

Trail Planning – Huffman provides an introduction of the current status of trail planning efforts working with Mariah Keagy of Sinuosity, and incorporating public forum input and analysis.

Keagy was not able to provide the draft recommendations prior to this meeting and was also not able to attend the meeting. Need to plan time in upcoming meeting to share input and discuss. Possible special meeting of the WCC. Members absent have indicated that they are willing to wait until next regular meeting. Members in attendance agree to wait till 5/17 meeting.

Vermont Land Trust outreach – Huffman notes his email exchange with VLT regarding the potential for trail (footpaths) and potential ski glade development within the Special Treatment Area (STA) as it pertains to the VLT easement language. Broadly, VLT believes that carefully sited footpaths within the STA would be acceptable under the terms of the easement, subject to specific location approval and management plan language conformance. Ski glades more difficult to approve. Both would require review by the VT Fish and Wildlife Department.

Planning – easement calls for specific management plan section regarding the STA. Current plan does not include a specific section for the STA. Need to address this in the future prior to any activity on the ground.

Sharp notes the MRVBC is interested in understanding the science behind the potential for gladed areas. Brandon Gap / USFS study ongoing will provide some insight. How to manage to provide the balance between wildlife and human uses? USFS developing a backcountry development handbook for managers.

Discussion of the public input received during the winter via online survey and remote public meeting. Cook leads a discussion on major themes from the public input exercise.

Like about the Scrag Forest

Solitude and Natural landscape themes very strong messages.  
Points of interest – waterfalls, beaver pond, ridgeline  
Proximity of the property to the Valley Floor.  
Lack of bicycles

Like to see unchanged

Low level of use  
Size of parking lot – limits use overall – positive  
Good Stewardship  
Dogs under control

Like to see changed

Loop trail at lower elevation  
Trail around the beaver pond  
Improve trail to the summit  
Backcountry ski access  
Improved overlooks and views  
Improved mapping

Loomis notes input received during public comment period from professional wildlife biologists who live in the Valley – Commission should factor their input into its thinking. Describes the current status of trail planning and initiatives that have been in place since 2014 trail assessment, as well as future possibilities in the Gateway Parcel. Main elements:

- Strong interest in trail to summit/ridgeline – worthy to pursue
- Important to consider wildlife impacts of trail around beaver pond
- Need to reroute main trail below/up to beaver pond – revisit Sinuosity's 2014 proposed alignment
- Capitalize on opportunities Gateway Parcel offers

Grimaldi echoes much of the same and notes that a loop around the beaver pond is probably a poor idea from a wildlife standpoint.

Joslin is in agreement, particularly regarding a trail to the top of the mountain and lower elevation trails on the Gateway parcel.

Donaldson provides some additional thoughts. High elevation areas are most sensitive – need to minimize impacts there.

Sharp notes MRVBC mission includes conservation and wildlife – not just managed terrain for skiing. Hard to envision no impact from ski glades in upper elevation area. Skiing opportunities are limited at Scrag, better elsewhere in the Valley. Some potential opportunities on skid roads.

Huffman wrap-up. Work to find the right balance. Looking forward to the Sinuosity draft recommendations. Will direct Keagy to the recorded version of this meeting for reference.

Further comment from the public present at the meeting – pleased with the efforts of the WCC and thoughtful process.

Stewardship and maintenance issues -

Trail closures during mud season(s) – discussion about a trail closure policy. Generally relying on trail users to use “common sense”.

Beaver pond to “saddle” trail – Is experiencing notable erosion. Has not had any maintenance and is not formally a trail.

Pet waste is being well managed and users appear to be respectful.

Lot 42 –

Joslin provides an update – Valerie Capels has done volunteer research for the Town into the Estate of A.E. Covell, which Joslin will relate to the probate court. Probate court will ultimately decide how to proceed regarding title to the property and whether the Town can take ownership of it. Joslin will attend 4/22 appointment with Court and see if Judge appoints him as administrator. If so, he’ll work with Capels on next steps.

Sharp notes that MRVBC isn’t likely to have strong interest in the parcel. From remote data it seems like there may not be much desirable skiing terrain on the property, and potential wildlife concerns.

#### 5. Austin parcel

2021 Field Work: Grimaldi – 8 total volunteers available to help with the stewardship. Summer and fall work days to be scheduled.

Loomis concerned with one new planting located within the access drive from Route 100 into the Austin parcel. Probably a mistake, but should be addressed.

Lindberg nominated the Austin project and collaboration with partners and volunteers for the VT Urban and Community Forestry Council - Tree Stewardship award. Award granted to the project.

The Award is noted as: 2021 Vermont Tree Steward: Volunteer Group

Should be announced in the Valley Reporter.

MOTION, by Joslin, seconded by Donaldson that the award be noted in the Valley Reporter and also notify the Selectboard. MOTION APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY

Consideration of Lindberg's proposal to list the Austin parcel as a Nationally Recognized "Homegrown National Park". Based on the native plantings established in the parcel. Discussion of the details and potential restrictions that would be placed on the property. Grimaldi and Joslin to work with Lindberg to gather more information and develop a proposal for Commission consideration at 5/17 meeting.

6. Wu Ledges public access management.

Parking seems to be in good shape. Cook added signage to keep visitors off Lots 7, 8, 9.

Loomis notes trail users with leashed dogs on marked trails.

Loomis notes lots 4 and 5 across from the parking lot have been sold.

7. Steward MRV initiative

Challenges identified in the initiative's pilot plan are largely outside of WCC purview, but worth watching as opportunities to collaborate will develop.

Direction of the initiative has the potential to impact groups responsible for stewardship of recreational sites that participate in the trails collaborative from the standpoint of protocol. Trash removal and general policing of the venues stewarded by the WCC would be front and center.

Joslin – collaborative effort important. Recreational community needs to attend to the challenges of trash, etc. that comes with recreational visitors.

Grimaldi – Town should cover the cost of trash removal in public places

Huffman – WCC stewarded properties are not in the scope of the workplan for the pilot project.

Donaldson – great initiative – funding details are the challenge. Municipality seems like the best avenue but collaborative effort could work too.

Sullivan – recognizes the issue at hand and is concerned about bringing this initiative to the more remote sites as it encourages trash deposition where there is a pack it in, pack it out ethic in place. Publicly visible areas should be the priority. Shared responsibility across the valley towns as they all benefit from the user visits.

Huffman – agrees that more remote trailheads should continue to be a pack in pack out trash protocol. Regarding potential funding – Waitsfield's Restroom Recreation and

Conservation Reserve fund could be a source for short-term availability but shouldn't be tapped for long term/ongoing use for an initiative such as this one.

Further discussion.

MOTION By Joslin, seconded by Grimaldi to authorize a working group of Cook, Loomis and Huffman to develop brief written feedback to the Steward MRV organizers regarding the initiative.

MOTION APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY

8. Engagement with Planning Commission on Act 171 compliance

Huffman as representative of the WCC provides a brief update on the working group efforts. Map of important forest blocks and habitat connectors is being drafted and revised, along with developing potential revisions to the town plan language to provide heightened attention to the mapped areas. Next joint PC-CC public meeting is May 4, 7pm – looking to get to closure on the map and potential town plan revisions.

Kudos to Huffman for applying his professional skills to the effort.

9. Commission vacancies and leadership –

Welcome James Donaldson to the WCC. Continue to have 1 vacancy

Leadership – Huffman notes that he will be stepping down as Chair. Anticipates continuing to be on point for coordination with Sinuosity on Scrag trail planning and collaboration with Planning Commission on Act 171 implementation.

10. Commission Logo

Discussion of the 3 proposed logos prepared by Audrey Huffman.

MOTION by Grimaldi seconded by Joslin to approve Concept #2 submitted by Audrey Huffman as the WCC logo.

MOTION APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY

11. Tri-Town CC collaboration

Next meeting Wednesday, May 26, at 7PM – 8:30 to be held via Zoom.

12. Status of funds and recap expenditures approved at this meeting.

Grimaldi provides comments on the monthly cash position.

Changes to funds is due to interest only.

Expenditures approved at this meeting – None

13. Other business

WCC next meetings 5/17 and 6/21 at 6:30 via Zoom

Discussion of potential agenda items for next meeting

14. Executive Session

MOTION - by Grimaldi seconded by Joslin to go into executive session to discuss possible real estate transaction. MOTION CARRIES UNANIMOUSLY  
WCC goes into executive session at 9:17

CC comes out of executive session at 9:52, with no action taken.

Grimaldi makes the motion to adjourn, seconded by Donaldson – MOTION APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY

Meeting adjourned at 9.52 PM

Respectfully Submitted by:  
Chris Loomis - Secretary