Wolcott Community Forest Committee

Notes from general meeting on Thursday, August 10, 2023
6 pm – 8 pm

1. Call to order (6:06 pm)
2. Organizational actions
    - Amendments to agenda
        - none
    - Approve minutes from last meeting
        - No quorum,
            - move to next meeting
3. Public comment
    - Dave: Looks like all mention of forestry activities have been scratched from the stewardship plan draft
        - Gordon: let's come back to this later
    - [unknown]: Concerned about the new water line installation; left a mess
4. Land purchase updates
    - Status report from TPL
        - Kate W:
            - Conservation easement draft is being written
                - Will be similar to draft posted in the Google drive
                - When complete, will be reviewed to ensure in complies with the grant requirements
            - Request for borders to be more clearly marked on the maps
                - Surveyors will handle this in the fall
                    - Some options for markers denoting the property edge
                        - Simple markers for border, more informative markers on trails
                    - Hayden: Ethan Gilmour, Holt-Gilmour Survey Associates
            - Two logos

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- Need to clarify before we order
    - Gordon: let's discuss after the meeting
- Gordon: is there a deadline?
    - Kate W: best to decide before we order and place them; looking for a supplier
        - Luke: Boss Signs

- Phase 2 work should begin in August
    - Recording property details at the time of purchase
        - Current landowners need to sign off
- Delays with affordable housing due to saturated soils
    - Test pits are delayed; final lot layout likewise delayed
- Appraiser is updating the Bourne property appraisal by mid-September, as it will have been more than one year
    - [unknown]: Are there any concerns about the Elmore bridge?
        - Gordon: not aware of any engineering study that has been done; not a town-owned bridge; Mariah was confident that it will be usable
            - Kate W: we can ask the bridge foreman to assess the integrity since the town will purchasing it
- Selectboard approval still needed to close in January
    - Gordon: may not have the final forestry component of the Stewardship Plan by September
        - Kate W: That's ok, so long as nothing is cut until the final management plan is in place; no trail-building until finalized
    - [unknown]: Emily Potter, is she responsible for this?

    - Gordon: yes; it will be incorporated into the stewardship plan and modified periodically

5. New business (6:30 pm)
    - ~~County Forester, Emily Potter~~ (postponed until next meeting)
    - Member experience with other organizations
        - Gordon:
            - Craftsbury Trails Committee; received VORAC funding for some activities; working with Sterling College and others to expand woodland trail network
                - Strictly local flavor; not trying to attract tourists
            - Craftsbury Outdoor Center speaker series (forestry topics); panel discussions with speakers from other regional organizations; covered wide range of topics (climate change, resiliency, predator load, motorized v. non-motorized, parking on back roads, and more)
                - Major theme: bringing different views together, so that they can talk face-to-face about the issues; raises interesting points (hunting and fishing pay for federal and state services that make other recreation purposes possible)
            - Propose that we sponsor a similar panel discussion and create a forum for these discussions as we consider how to manage this sizable resource
                - We are designated through our charter to build relationships with other organizations
                - Joe: were those meetings open to the public?
                    - Gordon: yes; they are a private group, but are interested in public involvement
                    - Came to learn about it through their member newsletter

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- Cate: next meeting topic is Climate Justice
  - Gordon: this will be relevant as our county has been identified by some studies as one of the top 10 to be least impacted by forecasted changes; likely to see many climate refugees in the future and increase demand upon resources
- Joe (unclear audio, 25:30 – 30:00)
  - Vermont Coverts
    - Hosts trainings, workshops and guest speakers
    - Teach landowners to promote biodiversity and healthy ecosystems
    - Annual meeting on September 9
- Dave
  - In September, work scheduled on Sheila's property
    - An area is marked to be cleared to provide food for birds and animals (patch cut)
    - Could possibly host a group to observe before/after to learn about the process
- Kate W:
  - Audubon Vermont
    - Teacher training and curriculum development opportunities, using town forest to promote interest in bird populations
    - Beginning to locate funding to build this program
      - Gordon: if you need help moving that conversation forward with WES, let me know

6. Ongoing (7:15 pm)

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- Mapping subcommittee, update
    - Luke:
        - We've stepped back to respect other people's space; not the right time to engage at this time
            - Gordon: is it being disbanded then?
                - Luke: not necessarily; but not motivated to do the work if it is making people upset
- Stewardship plan draft subcommittee, update
    - Critical pieces have been documented
    - Some new information
        - Funding from Forest Service has some strings attached
            - Town must be an equal opportunity provider
                - In process; required language to be included in the document
            - All communications (press releases, newsletters, etc.) must include language identifying the Forest Service funded the project
            - Kate W: and property must remain at least 75% forest
                - Gordon: that lays on top of easement requirements as well; does that requirement just apply to the Bourne parcel?
                    - Kate W: no, it applies to the whole forest
    - Kate W: were you planning on building out the website to collect public comment before going to the selectboard? Or after?
        - Gordon: we should do it before.
        - Kate W: put an announcement on Front Porch; should we plan a public meeting before?
            - Gordon: I don't think so

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- Cate: we can distribute at the BBQ

- Newsletter, update.
    - Gordon: needs to be started up again
- Public engagement
    - Town BBQ, September 8
        - Map is on the bulletin board in the town office
        - Gordon: I'll be there; any concerns about public engagement? We can correspond before the BBQ and go over talking points
            - Cate: let's get some photos and provide some history for the property, conversation starters
- Upcoming events
    - UVM research forest
        - New director would like to lead a public walk there; can follow up if there is interest
- Stewardship Plan language
    - Dave:
        - current draft language eliminates sustainable forest management
            - Bourne property sections will require some commercial cutting at some point down the line
            - Gordon: original language focused on harvesting for profit, rather than as managing a healthy forest; was changed based on discussions and survey results; not trying to preclude forest management, as we explored in our ongoing discussions here;
            - Luke: the survey supports that maintenance of a healthy forest; lack of manipulation does not result in a healthy forest; people don't want to be forking out money for forest operations; we can plan on a timed harvest to help balance this

- Gordon: there is no contradiction in what was written and what you are discussing; if you think the language does contradict it, let's explore this and use language that better expresses this; now is the time for this
- Dave: the forest management plans don't call for anything for 10 years, or very little; when Emily comes up with her plan, I think it's important that some small projects take place under forestry management and use it as an educational tool for the town to see why they are done; market for logging has tanked here; not likely that town can make any money doing this
    - [unknown]: any contact with the tech center, forestry program?
    - Gordon: no, we haven't; worthwhile thing to look in to
- Gordon: we, of course, need a forest management plan; Emily Potter will need to hear from us to help shape this document; this information is welcome to be included in the discussion
    - Language of the stewardship plan: the intention of the town forest is to support wildlife resiliency as opposed to promoting commercial extraction
        - Kate W: there has been interest in preserving a portion of the property for a timber stand; other communities have done so, many for educational purposes

- Next meeting Sep 14
    - Gordon: please provide any feedback on the draft language before the meeting

7. Adjourn (8:12 pm)