Wolcott Community Forest Committee

Next public meeting on Thursday, September 14, 2023
6 pm – 8 pm

Attending: DJ, Gabe, Kelly, Gilly, Joe C., Dave, Sheila, Cate, Gordon, Jack T., Emily Potter
Online: Maxfield, Kate

1. Call to order (6:03 pm)
2. Organizational actions
    - Amendments to agenda:
        - Emily Potter, County Forester is here to participate in the discussion
    - Approve minutes from last two meetings
        - July meeting
        - August meeting
            - Motion by Cate, Second by Roger - no discussion - unam
3. Public comment
    - none
4. Land purchase updates
    - Status report from TPL
        - Gordon:
            - Everything that I've heard suggests that we are still on track for closing in January; however, a government shutdown would likely impact/delay some critical items and/or the closing date
            - draft of conservation easement is circulating; can revisit it later
            - re: progress towards closing
                - Jack: attachment to the document: BDR (baseline documentation report)
                    - describes the property in great detail; required
                    - used by the Land Trust as a baseline to monitor the property to ensure compliance
                    - will contain a great number of photographs to document to existing condition
                    - usually prepared within a few months of signing the deeds, etc.
                - Gordon: NRLT will prepare the document?
                    - Jack: yes, much of the material already compiled by TPL will be used; photos will be taken in late October (after the leaves drop)
                - Joe:
                    - will it impact the trail network by Sinuosity?

- Jack: the trails won't be complete until fall 2024; but it will be monitored at least once annually; likely 3-4 times/year due to large property size
- welcome any committee members to share observations while passing through the property

- Gordon: will you need help collecting the documents/photos?
  - Jack: I think we have it covered; use special equipment to mark photos on the map to create precise documentation
- Dave: will this documentation be made available
  - Jack: yes
- Cate: are the boundaries already marked?
  - Gordon: probably not; that mentioned waiting until the leaves drop
- Gilly: would you like us to report any rogue trails?
  - Jack: yes; but ultimately the town would be responsible for correcting any violations
- Gabe: what about any current trails? would these be considered rogue?
  - Jack: those would likely be allowed, so long as they are not for motorized vehicles

5. New business
   - Feedback from Town BBQ
     - no official public input
6. Ongoing
   - Stewardship Plan draft subcommittee, update
     - Discuss role and organization of ongoing Forest Committee
     - Finalize Stewardship plan draft for submission to the Select Board
       - Gordon:
         - we have had access to the documents, several discussions and subcommittee meetings to shape this document; would like to highlight some areas that need revision; tonight is the night to finalize this document before submission
         - *Governance Structure*:
           - language currently included is largely from the original charter
           - 16 people is unwieldy; recommend 5 or 7 members

Wolcott Community Forest Committee

Next public meeting on Thursday, September 14, 2023
6 pm – 8 pm

- Gabe: what is the function of this ongoing committee?
    - Gordon: Stewardship is a living document; Select Board can manage directly or delegate
        - would discuss any changes to the rules in the stewardship plan
        - would consider proposed activities and evaluate the impacts, assess whether it complies with the easement rules; send recommendations to the Select Board
    - Cate: what about maintenance?
        - Gordon: TBD; may fall under the purview of the proposed Trails Committee
        - Gilly: should focus on decision making, vetting proposals, rather than management
        - Joe: Sinuosity will likely leave us with recommendations for ongoing maintenance and expected costs
            - Gordon: they build low-maintenance trails by design
        - Gordon: stewardship committee should advocate for a budget to address needs within the forest
    - DJ: makes sense to me to have a relatively small group with diversity; hoping that this diversity will persist moving forward; should focus on the skills and knowledge that would be ideal; those that have been involved and members of the community should have an opportunity
    - Jack: should it meet monthly or as issues come up?
        - Gordon: good point; would be up to the committee to decide; it would self-organize; there's scope for a motivated group to organize events within the forest (ex. Craftsbury

presentations); this resource lends itself to this purpose
- Gordon: Is everyone ok within a 7-person committee? ok

- Gordon: much of the original language of some sections is not open for edit (required language for the easement, etc.);
  - for example, harvesting of forest products (this is not completely off the table, but is not the primary purpose of this resource); [refers to the survey results]; preserving aesthetics and recreational value as number one goal; are we aligned?
    - Dave: no objection to limiting timber cutting, but should allow small scale projects (education, habitat preservation) rather than large scale timber harvesting - there's no money in it
    - Gilly: preserving biodiversity may require some managed cutting
      - Gordon: [refers to Goals section of the SP]; logging as a goal has been struck out
  - Cate: will we be using Emily's expertise regularly, on an ongoing basis?
    - Emily P.: I haven't been invited to yet in other communities, but would be open to it
    - Gabe: when do we know when a logging operation is permitted? what distinguishes between commercial or ecological need? we will need expert assessments; a pretty looking forest isn't always a healthy forest
      - Jack: ultimately, Emily will provide a management plan that will lay out expected actions, which could involve

        - cutting of trees that have value
        - Cate: could be to control dangerous pests, for example
    - Gordon: Forest Committee can recommend activities, but management activities **must** stick to the forestry plan; potential actions can be discussed, but county forester must determine
        - Emily: you would submit an amendment when necessary; if it makes sense, we would add the amendment to the plan
        - Cate: the plan would updated every 10 years
        - Emily: I can use much of the collected data to shape the forestry plan, as well; drfafting the plan would require input from the community
- Gordon: I added an table displaying survey results
- Gordon: VOREC trails grant
    - paragraph details what has been approved under the grant; it has been in the draft since it was first written
        - Cate: if trails are multi-use, why is mountain biking singled out?
            - Gordon: good question; should we refine this language?
            - Cate: they should clearly state that they are multi-use trails
        - Gordon: remove sentence with "...part of Velomont Trail Collective..." and language that specifies mountain bike use
        - Jack: should include "5 miles"

- Gordon: value of the property has to do with ecological factors, but also with proximity to roads; a lot of land is set aside for conservation, but not a lot of land set aside for recreation; future committee may want to consider this
  - Joe: whatever benefits the community, without disturbing the ecology, should be considered
    - Gordon: ready to move on? ok
- Gordon: summaries of the conservation easement; not ours to write, we should adopt the language provided as it satisfies the funders
  - BTW - there is a carve out for the proposed wastewater project already included; only amendment currently included in that language
    - Jack: I think that's correct
    - Kate: another amendment was made to protect a small cliff area that hosts rare mosses; restricts recreation and management uses in this area (special ecological area); current trail must be closed to satisfy this
    - Gordon: should we actively prevent people from walking up there?
      - Kate: not sure without having visited it; should go out and take a look at how its been used in the past; probably won't require special signage; will add to the map and send out tomorrow and will ask that a sentence or two be added to the draft
- Gordon: that ends my list of discussion topics; still some more blanks to fill in (that do not require much discussion); ask that you let me work with TPL to finish polishing the

Wolcott Community Forest Committee

Next public meeting on Thursday, September 14, 2023
6 pm – 8 pm

- Cate proposed, Roger second
  - unam
- Gilly: should we post signage for sensitive areas?
  - Gordon: the newly formed committee should consider those concerns
  - Roger: might be best to consider after the necessary data sets have been compiled including forestry plan

- Gordon: we should be strongly considering what the next steps should be; will be working with others to shape some proposals myself
- Gordon: sugaring may come up as an area of interest; plan reflects our discussions
  - Dave: once you tap the trees and hang the lines, you limit access; loses any lumber value; ruins the value of the "butt" log; weakens the trees in my experience; leased taps are not very lucrative
    - Kate: it was in the document in order to enhance the appeal of the application, not trying to force any specific activity; at Huntington School, they rejected commercial tapping, but did tap a few trees for education purposes
- Upcoming events
  - Select Board meeting on Sep 20
  - Roger: should we continue having meetings
    - Kate: other towns usually have a conservation committee; would recommend ongoing meetings to manage needs, etc.
      - will need to approve the Forestry Plan
    - Roger: should continue to prepare handoff to new ongoing committee and new trails committee

Review original charter:
[review charter document and tracking sheet]

- more newsletters?
- add some information for the town report
- mail a trail map to every home, once available
- research grants?
  - can we access tourism funds? are the drawbacks worth it?
- room to do more; need to decide to do it and follow through

- Dave: will there be a title search prior to closing? would help shape the history of the property
  - Kate: TPL did a full title work up; will be passed off to the town soon; shared with Linda 6 months ago, reviewed by the town attorney; been working through some issues; final report will be done by closing and will be shared with the town

Wolcott Community Forest Committee

Next public meeting on Thursday, September 14, 2023
6 pm – 8 pm

1. Adjourn (7:42 pm)