Wolcott Community Forest Committee

Next public meeting on Thursday, November 9, 2023
6 pm – 8 pm

At the **Wolcott Town Office**
or join the **online Zoom Meeting**:
Meeting ID: 814 3120 2980
Passcode: 944699

Agenda

1. Call to order (6:07 pm)
2. Organizational actions
    a. Amendments to agenda
        i. Emily Potter did not respond; removed from agenda
    b. Approve minutes from last meeting
        i. Moved, Cate; Second, Dave; passed unanimously
3. Public comment
        i. none
4. Land purchase updates
    a. Status report from TPL
        i. finalized budget for fundraising; will need to seek some additional funds to cover surveying costs, etc.; likely complete before closing, but maybe after closing
        ii. VHCB and VFS, preparing closing packages for both; probably a month needed for them to review; projecting close in late January 24; government shutdown could delay
        iii. some minor revisions:
        iv. mention of the artificial pond (Bourne property), and earthen dam on that property re: occasional maintenance by volunteers (limit re-vegetation on the dam)
            - too small to monitored by the state; no need for state oversight
            - Gordon: is it discretionary to maintain the dam/pond?
                - Hayden: primary maintenance would just be controlling vegetation, or it may spill out (1/2-acre size pond, 500K cubic feet); could be a safety risk
                    - Gordon: if it's a safety risk, we should maintain it

- Linda: would the dam maintenance show up in the maintenance plan?
  - Hayden: it's included in the stewardship plan; pruning back new sapling growth; may need to be noted by Emily Potter in her report
    - Linda: needs to be written down, or it could easily be forgotten
    - Gordon: the forestry management plan should be the correct place for that; we have it the language added to the stewardship plan

v. bridge over Elmore branch of Biddell property was not mentioned; added mention
vi. re: Bourne ecological assessment- cut off a section of trail that is too close to a protected wildlife section; could be done with volunteers
vii. the proposed changes should be passed to the select board for review
  - Gordon: agreed; would be easy to see using track changes

viii. Hayden: in stewardship plan, remove mention of pedestrian bridge under the VORAC grant, since it is no longer viable following the flood; Sinuosity is working to adjust the previous plan accordingly
  - Gabe: earthen dam, is it ok at the moment?
    - Hayden: looks like it hasn't been done for some time; some of the current growth should be removed once the sale is closed

b. Gordon: **We should keep an ongoing document for maintenance tasks that have been mentioned during these discussions Could you handle this, Roger?**
  - **yes**

5. New business (6:30 pm)
   a. Forestry Plan, discussion with county forester Emily Potter
      i. [postponed]
6. Ongoing (7:15 pm)
   a. FY24 budget, update

i. Gordon: town has a grant for town website development, Bradley is the lead on this; town requested that we fold any town forest website development work into the town website project; otherwise, the rest of the budget was taken under advisement
   - Linda: we're using ARPA funds for the website

ii. Has there been discussion about an endowment coming out of TPL fundraising?
   - Hayden: not sure what this will look like in its final form; there will likely be some funds coming out of it specifically for the forest; not sure how much
   - Gordon: expect that there will be some support in the town to add an expense line in the town budget for ongoing maintenance

iii. Linda: Hayden - are there delays in subdividing the Biddell property for HFH?
   - Hayden: needed to add a small amount of land to meet minimum requirement for road facing; parcel is still less than 2 acres; waiting for final approval in the next few weeks, everything else should be done by closing

b. Trail planning

i. Gordon: VORAC grant specified a trails committee that has never been seated; select board clarified unanimously that the forest committee should fill that role; helps to clarify the recommended changes to the conceptual trail map provided by Sinuosity; we can officially make those changes; we need to step into that role and review the terms of the VORAC grant, and a trail committee to help build the trails, will need to recruit and help coordinate volunteers that understand the design and required tasks; need to identify a point person to communicate with Sinuosity
   - Cate: did we not have a list of potential volunteers?
     - Gordon: yes, but I'm not sure where that list is located
       i. Linda: there was no response besides Jim Ryan and Jim Holden; could post of FPF for volunteers

ii. Gordon: we can take that on, but with holidays approaching, now may not be the best time; can work with Sinuosity when the timing is right
iii. Gabe: our trail-building team will likely grow into our ongoing maintenance team

- Gordon: **we should form a trail subcommittee, to make sure that forestry plan and stewardship plan, as well as terms of the easement, are followed**

- Gordon: Have not heard back from Mariah regarding the proposed changes to the conceptual trail map; there was some discussion about buffer zones
  - Jack: Sinuosity was seeking confirmation of how close they can get to streams and if they can cross streams; looking through the language now; no concerns at this point regarding stream crossings, but trails should not be directed through a wetland and/or vernal pool; these were communicated to Kate and she seemed satisfied
    i. Cate: once the conceptual design has been completed, we can review it to ensure the buffers are in place
  - Gordon: Sinuosity will flag a corridor, but finer focus decisions will be made on the ground, likely as we walk the property
    i. Jack: Matt Peters produced some detailed maps; Sinuosity has all of that

c. Public engagement – public events, public communications (inc. website)

i. Gordon: would like a series of public talks informing about the unique wildlife in this forest; what would be the purpose of having a speaker? could present to the town to share what is present, we need a catalogue to describe what properties are regional and what activities are allowed on each

- Gabe: speaker series, out in the forest or indoors? or both? could be interesting; public lands are a hot button issue; skies the limit where it comes to speakers
- Roger: should be launched near the opening of the forest; with calls for speakers early
- Cate: people seem to enjoy being outside more

ii. Dave: does NRLT have a lot of private properties that are not accessible to the public?
- Jack: most are private; of the 15 easements, only one has a trail system

iii. Gordon: **is there a volunteer here willing to try and organize a speaker series? we'll keep it on the agenda until we get to it**
- Gabe: there is no reason that we can't have repeat speakers
    - Cate: would be nice to be able to pay them
    - Gordon: we could also solicit donations to pay speakers from attendees

iv. Roger: re: website; any ideas beyond the usual (calendar, location, pictures, acknowledgements, allowed activities, etc.)?
- Gordon: adopt-an-acre concept; allows people to observe and report how the land changes over time; may have limited appeal, but relates to the website; interested people would in effect be performing a longitudinal study for wildlife migration, invasive species, points of interest could have a place to share information
- Linda: ecological studies, reports should be posted too; a lot of great information that can be shared; have a link to access these documents
- Gordon: Chat GPT could create a bibliography for these documents; make them easier to locate and to appreciate this work
    - Could have a featured document of the "day"
- Gabe: trail map and trail conditions, information of how to enjoy the trail, while minimizing impact
    - Roger: could add a local weather widget to the page
- Gordon: **are you volunteering to work with Bradley to take on the webpage Roger?**
    - **Yes**

i. Gordon: we'll check in at the next meeting to review your progress

- Gordon: could provide guidance for how for the ARPA funds could be used
  - iNaturalist - opportunity to take a picture of something interesting, marks date and time; could be promoted and linked
- Cate: North Branch Nature Center (Montpelier) has a great website and great activities
  - Gordon: could build partnerships to develop our speaker series and other programs, potential partnerships;

v. Dave: the school principal could possibly join our meeting, for ideas as to how access to the forest can help the school design programs

vi. Jack: BDR is virtually complete; all photography is done; mostly traversed the border areas

d. Roger: any word on the right of way through the Westover property?

i. Hayden: Right of Way for Westover property; document has been delivered and she seemed ready to sign
   - Linda: she stated that she had applied for a buyout; may create some problems due to current use; if bought out, the town owns the property; will reach out to her

ii. Hayden: if you can, that would be great
   - Linda: not sure the best way to approach it; she has active sugaring on the property; if she gets a buyout, there can't be any buildings on the property
     - Gordon: haven't crossed her property, but am really familiar with the surrounding property; would be a great addition; have some reservations about having an active sugaring operation, but could be beneficial as a community resource; but there are some questions that would need to be explored
     - Linda: a FEMA buyout is forever, no buildings on the property; because she has so much land that is not in the flood plain, exploring how to subdivide it so that it could qualify

i. Hayden: what would happen to the property that is not in the flood plain? we would need the right of way before she sells it
    1. Linda: we're still working on some way to acquire that land; it's not a priority but would be an asset
        a. Hayden: there would be some flexibility with how we could use that land outside of the easement
    2. Linda: I'll reach out to Tammy to sign that regardless of what we come up with

- Gordon:
    i. might be a good parking lot, too; not sure how to fundraise for it, but it would be a great fit
    ii. Cate: is all the ARPA funding spoken for?
        1. Linda: not yet; but we could possibly use it for anything that we anything in our normal budget
        2. Linda: there are 3 properties by the East Elmore bridge, along the ball field, that are in the buyout process; keep that in mind, could be owned by the town soon
    iii. Gordon: need to brainstorm how to fundraise to buy the Westover property

7. Adjourn (8 pm)