Wolcott Community Forest Committee

General Meeting Notes
Thursday, February 8, 2024
6 pm – 8 pm

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

Attending: Gordon, Roger, Jack T., Mike Green, Dave, Sheila, Joe C., Cate, DJ, Kelly, Gilly

Online: Hayden, Gabe, Maxfield

1. Call to order (6:02 pm)
2. Organizational actions
    a. Amendments to agenda
        i. [Roger] yes, see below
    b. Approve minutes from last meeting
        i. Moved Sheila, Second Gilly
            1. Passed unan.
3. Public comment
    a. [Dave] Land for sale in North Wolcott, near the village, 42 acres; was white pine that was logged out 20 years ago; Town may buy them out through Flood Relief Buy Out program; could be good for timbering in another 20 years (Bolio(?) property)
        i. [Gordon] such properties may become town forest by default, if city continues to acquire property
4. Land purchase updates (6:10 pm)
    a. Status report from TPL
        i. [Hayden] Phase 2, Bedell property
            1. Soil sampling at 2 locations; affordable housing site and former telephone pole site; report just came back; soil has elevated contaminants that will require

remediation at both locations, which pushes back closing deadline

a. Telephone pole site – relatively straight-forward; immediate area around pole; DEC will review the report, once complete planning can begin to remove the contaminated topsoil (5 ft deep); then it needs to be certified as complete; if expedited, could close by end of April
b. Affordable housing lot – separate parcel now, and will require more work; closing on this site will occur later
    i. [Gordon] Habitat for Humanity site, is that separated? is funding separated?
    ii. [Hayden] the town forest funding will not be used to purchase the affordable housing site; this will be processed separately as a donation from the property owner; progress depends upon the next 2 weeks, the Phase 2 response from DEC; town forest portion should proceed quickly to facilitate an estimated end of April close

2. [Dave] Another problem; a chunk of land that surrounds a plot owned by Fred Martin with an occupied shed; there is an agreement to move the shed off of town forest property

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a. [Hayden] hope that this doesn't affect the close; been working with the tenant for months; hope is that it can be resolved once the snow melts; must be complete before close

ii. [Hayden] finalizing surveys for both properties; really close; boundary blazing has been done for Bourne property, but not for the portion of the property that abuts the affordable house section

iii. Closing documentation is being prepared as we await the green light to close; helping to wrap up due diligence processes

iv. Sinuosity

1. We have the updated map; working with them to coordinate work to begin in the spring

v. [Cate] all of the funding should be in place by then?

1. [Hayden] Funding is in place; ready to go when closing is set

vi. [Gordon] so we're held up by a few yards of dirt at an old telephone site?

1. [Hayden] yes; contractors could have left contamination last fall (perhaps chain saw oil); regardless, we have to remove the affected soil

b. Westover property

i. No update yet; maybe next month

5. New business (6:30 pm)

a. Updated Concept Trail Map, Sinuosity

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i. [Gordon] unfortunately, Brook and Mariah are out of country and cannot be present tonight; however, they sent an updated version of the map and commentary
    1. We asked for a change in focus; wanted trails on north-facing slopes closer to the town, and less in the back end of the Bedell and Bourne properties
    2. Brook has some opinions on the suitability of the landscape proposed; focusing on difficulty level of the trails, beginner v. more experienced
    3. Reworked trails are slightly more than 5 mi
    4. Westover property - Brook identified a loop that could be incorporated into the trails; could allow mountain bikes but may not be attractive for bikers there
    5. Southern Field Loop – suggested main loop around the field with another loop that is more challenging
    6. Eastern slope route – asked for a focus on recreation and has been updated
    7. [refers to map to show other changes]
ii. [Dave] will the trails all go around the retained Bedell property?
    1. [Gordon] yes; it all goes around
iii. [Dave] how about Gates Farm Rd?
    1. [Gordon] No
iv. [Gordon] They did mention that addition of Westover Rd would increase the milage beyond the parameters of the grant; recommends holding off on the such improvements

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v. until additional funding is secured; biking and skiing access would still be possible without improvements
    1. [Roger] May be good to hold off to reduce accidental traffic to/from the school; students still have access through existing trail
    2. [Hayden] proposed trails may be too wet to develop right away
vi. [DJ] How much additional funding would be required for phase 2?
    1. [Gordon] not sure; we had planned to compile questions for Sinuosity during this meeting
vii. [Joe] What's the timeline for Phase 1?
    1. [Gordon] VORAC money must be spent by end of year
viii. [Joe] and Phase 2?
    1. [Gordon] we would have to raise any additional funding to complete Phase 2
ix. [Gordon] don't see an obvious proposal to reallocate resources to other trails than what is proposed by Sinuosity;
x. [Kate] VORAC funding is capped at 5 miles?
    1. [Gordon] yes
xi. [Roger] what about the funding allocated for the bridge? We're not building the bridge anymore; what is happening to those funds?
    1. [Hayden] good question for Sinuosity; suspect that those funds may have been reallocated to features such as parking facilities and kiosks, but have not seen an updated budget for the project

xii. [Dave] Jack, is there an objective to cutting a trail across the high end of the Bourne property?
    1. [Jack] would have to looked at by NRLT and VHCB; usually not a problem, but would have to see the specific proposal; would not be good to run it along a stream or through a wetland, but we would work with you
    2. [Jack] Assuming that Sinuosity has considered Matt Peters survey and are avoiding sensitive species, etc.
        a. [Gordon] Brook has had access to the materials that Kate had; your assumption is likely spot on, that they are aware of this information

xiii. [Roger] Looks good to me so far; when do we start?

xiv. [DJ] curious to know about how long it will take to complete it? Some concerns about the timeline?

xv. [Roger] questions about staffing, volunteers and timing

6. Ongoing (7:15 pm)
    a. Update, Website
        i. [Roger] presentation
            1. There is a working draft of the website in the town website environment; added a call out to acknowledge first peoples; we need to develop the text for it and obtain high resolution pictures of the forest; we have placeholders for volunteer recruitment, event schedule, permitted recreation, etc.; social media links are embedded; we also have wolcottwoods.org

reserved if we decide to further develop the web resources beyond the town website

ii. **[Gabe] we haven't talked to the Abenaki yet; would need to have it reviewed**
    1. **[Roger] I'll reach out to Maria to see if she'll share her contact**

iii. [Gilly] is Wolcott Woods our final name?
    1. [Gordon] we should decide this. Any comments?
    2. [Dave] label the parcels as memorial parcels (Bedell and Bourne families) on signs throughout the property
        a. [Gordon] let's stay focused on the overall name; acknowledgements make sense, and we can revisit this
        b. [Gordon] could officially be branded as Wolcott Town, keep both, or change to the other
            i. [Cate] Wolcott Woods will likely be the adopted name for the town, as its easier to say
            ii. [Gordon] Linda said in her view was that it's the Community Forest
            iii. [Roger] can we ask the Select Board?
                1. [Gordon] yes

b. Update, Subcommittee for Speakers and Education
    i. [Gordon] Nothing new at this time

c. [Joe C] Guest speaker, Kevin Tolan

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i. Lead biologist for vernal pool program; has a group of volunteers who set up audio recorders to track frog populations; asked if he would a walk in the late spring, when amphibians have already bred, to discuss program and what data is used for; would be more willing to do it, but has started a graduate program at UVM (will connect next month); shared another contact that may be willing, as well, if schedule does not allow; maybe lead to additional education and research; asked if we have a map on ATLAS, to verify that these are identified vernal pools
    1. [Gordon] so you will coordinate and find a time for this presentation? Feel free to ask for help when you are ready
        a. [Joe] believe that late spring early summer would be best; probably after closing
        b. [Kelly] we're on the vernal pool program with him; we've laid the ground work for this already, and have a confirmed vernal pool on the property; mentioned 4 potential species on the property
        c. [**Gordon] if you feel comfortable coordinating this, let us know when**
            i. [Joe] sure
        d. [Hayden] There could certainly be more, because the ones identified during the survey look to be different than those on the ATLAS map

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7. Adjourn (7:35 pm)