

**Town of Williston Conservation Commission (WCC)**  
**Minutes of September 14, 2016**  
**Approved**

1. Anthony called the meeting to order at 7:06 AM. No public comment.  
**Presentation by John Woodward, VYCC Community Programs Manager, on VYCC Community Crews**  
John manages VYCC community programs. VYCC wants to work with new communities. VYCC runs 2 program areas – trail crews and farm/food crews. Their mission is to build social capital throughout Vermont. They recruit and hire 15-18 year-olds for community crews, and hire experienced 20-24 year-olds for crew leaders. Then they look for priority projects throughout Vermont. VYCC’s model is to strengthen communities through this work. Spike crews go out and camp for 8-12 weeks, in backcountry mostly – state parks, etc. Community crews meet in the morning and work 8-5 in communities where they live, a day job. 6-8 person crew and 2 crew leaders. In 2016 they had 7 community crews, next year they are expanding to southern VT and northeast kingdom – 7-9 crews. St Albans crew does a lot of work in the city. VYCC tailors the work of the crew to what the community needs. Youth development is the second piece – VYCC provides orientation to the organization and helps them develop job skills. Many kids are unsure and unconfident at first but grow a lot during the experience. For many, it is their first experience working with a team, and they are able to apply those job skills to their next experience. Often crew members go on to become crew leaders. Example – Town of Dorset employed a community crew for the first time this year to work in the Dorset Town Forest. Tangible accomplishments resulted but more importantly the community involvement and investment proved very successful. Kids came from Dorset schools, community was invested in their success. Building that community support for the Community Crew and their work has been a key contribution to strengthening the community overall. Jude asked how they recruit? John stated they build relationships with public schools and tech centers – go to classes and talk about the program. Recruit crew leaders from colleges and tech schools. They look for kids in local community as much as possible. Williston is close to VYCC home base – Richmond, with an advantage of being right where all the action is. Melinda and John have had discussions about potential projects, and John feels they are a great fit for what a community crew can do. Crews are employed through the summer, so won’t miss any school. Broken up into 2 four week sessions with the option to enroll in both sessions. An educational component is included – Reading/Writing/Discussion, which is a powerful piece of the program. In Williston there’s clearly a lot of work to be done, and kids in

the Town who could benefit from this experience. Funding is typically through a mixture of Town dollars and matching grant funds. Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation funding has been available to supplement crew member wages, and VYCC also applies for other grants to supplement funding. Historically, Williston has worked with VYCC on a sporadic, year by year basis. Disadvantage of that approach is that it's difficult to plan out the implementation of projects over the long term. Seed money is available to help start up a community crew in Williston. A VYCC Americorps crew has been working in Williston this week, so Melinda has seen firsthand what a crew can accomplish. Community crew comes with all the support needed including recruitment, training, supervision, insurance, administrative costs, etc. they come ready to complete the projects. Jean asked what happens when a crew member quits or is fired. John said that occasionally crew members quit, but it's rare for them to be fired. During training they work on group management strategies, so most of those issues come up during the training experience. DVR also provides a lot of support and individual counseling services, and helps crew members experiencing challenges at home to better deal with and manage those challenges so that they are prepared to work each day. Jude asked whether VYCC tries to get kids to come back for a second year – John stated yes, they do, and often crew members return as crew leaders. Anthony asked what kind of training do the crew leaders get regarding dealing with troubled crew members and the issues they are facing. They get a lot of training internally in how to deal with issues that come up. Key to community support is to get parents involved. In Manchester, kids held an event inviting community members and telling them what the experience was like for them, which was very successful in fostering a connection between family members, crew members and the community. Jean asked about the VYCC's stability in general. There have been some changes in leadership and funding sources. Funding requires creativity and many partnerships, but John stated that the biggest challenge is finding crew members. They have ramped up recruiting efforts in the last few years. Melinda asked how much money the Town would need to come up with to support a community crew – hard to come up with a hard and fast number. With grant funding maybe \$10-20,000 for a 4-week crew. Melinda suggested not hiring a summer intern and using that money to support a crew. Jude mentioned the Winooski Valley Park District (WVPD) funding and reevaluating the Town's membership. If the Town withdrew its membership from WVPD, those funds could potentially be used to support a crew. The WCC discussed the WVPD funding formula. Kim pointed out the mission of the WVPD to protect the watershed, everyone benefits from it so everyone should contribute. Melinda mentioned RTP grants and other grants this fall that would help

to fund a community crew. John mentioned also possibly pulling money out of public works budget. If DVR funding is continued, they provide \$1,000 per week. John will put together a proposal including funding options, etc., and list of potential options to consider in terms of length 4 week versus 8 week. Assessment crew for 1 week?

2. Discussion of trail priorities and planning
  - Short-term goals and priorities – maintenance of existing trails, high-priority new trail development – Jude mentioned the Chatham Woods trail connection. Heritage Meadows HOA easement – they are asking for a bridge connection to their common land. Jude would like us to have an assessment done on what this would take in terms of feasibility and cost.
  - Kim asked about partnerships with other organizations like Fellowship of the Wheel. Are there formal agreements in place? Who is responsible for trail maintenance? Next meeting – discuss park and trail planning as related to the budget.
3. Meeting was adjourned at 8:30 AM.

Minutes Submitted by Melinda Scott: September 21.

Approved by WCC: September 21.