

Catamount Community Forest Planning Committee

Minutes of September 25, 2017

Approved (10-23-2017)

Members Present: Anthony Jordick, Terry Marron, Kort Longenbach, Jay Diaz, Michael Clauss, Jeff Dickinson, Barb Evans, Ben King, Steve Page, Patrice Maloney, Ben Norris, Rita Dessau

Members Absent:

Others Present: Melinda Scott (staff), Kim Coleman (facilitator), Andrea Shortsleeve (Department of Fish and Wildlife), Lea Davison (Little Bellas)

Goal: Learn about community forestry and this forest in particular

1. Kim reviewed the meeting goals and objectives.
2. **Housekeeping items:**
 - a. **Meeting schedule reminder** – future meetings will be held on the fourth Monday of every month, from 6-8 PM. If Holidays fall on any of these dates, the meeting for that month will be rescheduled.
 - b. **Approve 7-31-2017 and 8-15-2017 minutes** – The minutes of 7-31-2017 and 8-15-2017 were approved as written.
 - c. **Lease update** – Kim stated that the Town and COFC are in the process of negotiating a lease agreement, which will be presented to the Committee at a future meeting.
 - d. **Other items?** No other items were brought up
3. **Prioritization exercise** – Kim explained the prioritization exercise to the group. The goal of the exercise is to prioritize topics to discuss at future meetings, as the Committee will not have sufficient time to discuss all potential topics. Each person was given 5 sticky dots, and was asked to place the dots under the topics they most wanted to have the Committee discuss. Placing more than one dot under a single topic was allowed. The topics will then be prioritized according to the total number of dots for each.
4. **Catamount Outdoor Family Center (Kort)**
 - a. **Presentation** –The PowerPoint has been uploaded to Google Drive in the 9/25/2017 folder.
 - b. **Questions for Kort** – Questions raised included:
 - How does the COFC raise money beyond fees? Currently they engage in some limited fundraising, and this could be expanded upon. With Town ownership, COFC will be looking to leverage Town assistance with grant writing
 - What is the fee structure? Annual memberships (includes the weekly trail running and mountain biking series), summer season pass (3 levels) and daily passes
 - Is there any enforcement of trail usage and fees? No or little enforcement, trail usage is by the honor system.

- Does the overhead change as other activities such as summer camps are added? Not much, although this needs further investigation, especially in consideration of future additional activities on the property

5. Little Bellas (Lea Davison)

- a. Presentation** – Lea is a 2 time Olympian and now professional mountain bike racer. She is the co-founder of Little Bellas. Lea grew up in Jericho and was introduced to mountain biking at Catamount. Little Bellas is a mentoring on mountain biking program for girls aged 7 to 16. They have expanded to 18 different venues across the country. At Catamount 180 girls and 28 mentors have participated in the program. They operate at Catamount 40 days out of the year, with 4 week long camps and 12 Sunday afternoon programs. The program is important because it gets kids outside and immersed in a natural setting. What Little Bellas needs to be successful –
- Safe, well maintained trails and a progression of trails from easy to advanced
 - A lightning-safe shelter - this is essential
 - Trails that can be ridden in bad weather as well as good – trails with good drainage
 - A large mowed field, for games, skills progression, and as a meeting place
 - Large parking area for drop off and pick up (65 participants)
 - Bathrooms (portalets are okay)
 - Picnic tables in the shade
 - “Pump track” – dirt track with bumps, needs to be mowed and maintained

Lea hopes the Committee will consider the needs of Little Bellas in making decisions/recommendations about potential uses of the community forest. Related to that, she stated some concerns about allowing dogs and horses and being able to ensure the safety of program participants.

b. Questions for Lea:

- Mike Claus asked Lea to provide a written list of desired conditions at Catamount needed for Little Bellas to operate successfully.
- Ben Norris asked what is the relationship between Little Bellas and Catamount? Lea stated that they rent from COFC. Kort stated they are a separate entity and their participant numbers are not included in COFC participant numbers he presented earlier.
- Kim asked whether in the future they would rent from COFC or the Town? Kort stated that if COFC was to bear the responsibility of trail maintenance, then they should be collecting the fees.
- Terry Marron asked about whether there could be a separate area where dogs are allowed? Anthony Jordick asked whether dogs are currently allowed at Catamount and Kort answered no, they are not.
- Someone asked when Little Bellas operates at Catamount and Lea responded that they run programs from May through August.
- Someone asked what the revenue was from user fees for Little Bellas, and Lea stated she wasn't sure but could provide that figure to the Committee.

- Mike Claus asked whether COFC has identified a potential location for a building? Kort stated they haven't except for one potential location outside the Community Forest, the former skating rink.
- Jay Diaz asked what are the hours of the Little Bellas programs, and Lea stated they run camps from 8-Noon and 8-4, and the Sunday program from 4-6:30. Steve Page suggested that timing of other uses might be a way to accommodate them without conflicting with COFC and Little Bellas activities.
- Steve asked about the budget for trail maintenance, which is stated as \$12,000 in Kort's presentation. Kort stated this only accounts for materials, not labor. This needs to be revisited to determine the actual costs.
- Jay asked if there is timber harvesting going on currently? Andrea stated there was a recent harvest.
- Jay asked whether structures like benches, picnic tables and pavilions are allowed under the grant provisions. Melinda stated that yes, structures that support outdoor recreation are allowed.
- Jeff Dickenson asked about whether other kinds of fundraising – campaigns, etc. – have been employed by either organization. Kort and Lea both stated that their organizations have done such fundraising to a limited extent but there is opportunity to grow this.
- Mike asked Lea whether, in her opinion as a professional racer, there is much need for trail improvements. Kort answered this saying that the race series puts more wear and tear on the trails because they hold races where others would cancel them, for example in very wet conditions. However, the trails are still in pretty good shape. In the more remote areas like Indian Lookout, there is greater need because these areas are less well maintained. Lea agreed that they need to put more effort into trail maintenance to keep up with other mountain biking areas, especially when people pay to ride at Catamount. Kort stated that they have rotated trails to some degree to let certain trails rest for a few years and use different routes instead.
- Patrice asked about Fellowship of the Wheel (FOTW) – are they active at Catamount as well? Kim stated yes, but there is no formal relationship. Lea stated they have constructed several trails at Catamount that are amazing. FOTW is part of Vermont Mountain Biking Association (VMBA), and they operate using a different model. FOTW solicits donations but does not require fees to use their trails. They typically negotiate agreements with private landowners to build trails on private land, then they build and maintain these trails.

6. Planning Outreach

- a. **Appoint chair** – Kim stated that Ben Norris has agreed to serve as Chair, and will represent the Committee at presentations to the Selectboard.
- b. **Presentations** – Melinda stated that this far, there has been one public meeting, held very early on in the project (last February) to introduce the community to the idea of a community forest. There was also a Walk and Talk in August co-sponsored by the library. Over a dozen people attended.

- c. **Other events, such as walks** – Melinda suggested having another one or two walks and talks during fall/winter.

7. Media (Observer, Facebook, etc.)

- Steve Page asked whether there is information related to outreach available from other communities that have developed town forests. Melinda stated that Hinesburg employed walks and talks, and that other towns could be a resource.
- Kim asked, does the Committee want to interface with local papers and other media? Mike stated that at the very least, the Committee should interface with The Observer in order to let the public know that the Committee is meeting. He suggested an open forum perhaps as an extra meeting in the middle of the month, to inform people in the community what the Committee is doing.
- Patrice stated that there should be a website where periodic updates are posted, or use Front Porch Forum.
- Ben Norris suggested combining a news article with an announcement of a future open forum. This would be a separate, special meeting for people to get information about the project and for the Committee to answer questions.
- Andrea Shortsleeve asked whether we have reached out to Vermont Woodlands and/or Vermont Coverts, as they are interested in this type of effort.
- Kim asked whether there are 2-3 people willing to serve on a public outreach subcommittee. Barbara Evans, Terry Marron and Mike Claus volunteered.
- Kim stated that we will also be looking to have groups of people spearhead discussions on the prioritized future meeting topics.

2. Open Comment – There was no public comment.

On the agenda for next month:

- Presentations and discussion about habitat at Catamount
- Lease agreement discussion

Meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM.