

## Catamount Community Forest Planning Committee

Minutes of June 25, 2018

Approved

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

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**Members Absent:** None

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**Others Present:** Melinda Scott (staff), Kim Coleman (facilitator), Kate Wanner (Trust for Public Land).

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Goal: Contribute and discuss feedback on Management Plan; develop Management Plan memo to be presented at 7/10 Selectboard meeting

1. Kim reviewed the goals for the meeting.
2. Public Comment: There was no public comment.
3. Housekeeping items:
  - o Approve 5/7/2018 minutes: The minutes were approved with revisions.
4. Selectboard meeting - Initial feedback on Management Plan: Melinda summarized the feedback from the Selectboard thus far. They have a lot of documents to review related to the Catamount purchase and to date only one Selectboard member had read the Plan. The feedback was that the Plan was overly long and difficult to read. It was suggested to condense the background information or to take it out of the body of the Plan and include it as an Appendix so as to make it more readable. Also, that the high burden placed on dog walkers was overly prohibitive. Rick has provided some guidance on drafting a memo for the July 10 Selectboard meeting. The memo should state what, if any revisions have been made to address feedback from the Selectboard. If no revisions have been made, explain why not.
5. Discussion on feedback received and preparing for the July 10 Selectboard Meeting
  - Mike asked if the Committee can respond to the Selectboard prior to the meeting, and how best to prepare for that meeting. Melinda stated that the goal of this meeting is to prepare a draft memo to the Selectboard that will hopefully frame the discussion.
  - Kate stated her concerns about making sweeping changes to the Plan based on feedback from a single Selectboard member.
  - Kim suggested that the memo state the Committee's desire to hear feedback from other Selectboard members prior to making changes.
  - Patrice stated she previously submitted feedback to Melinda regarding the Plan's length and the repetition, and feels that is relatively easy to address.
  - Kate stated that the length of Management Plans has varied among the towns she's worked with, however, there are certain federal and state requirements that have to be met. She feels it's better to have too much information than too little,

especially when considering turnover in town boards and staff. Context is important in the overall understanding of a property's management strategies.

- Melinda agreed the Plan can be condensed and consolidated, and invited the members to take a stab at it using Tracked Changes in Word.
- Kate said the policies are the most important part of the document, and should be vetted by the Recreation Committee and the Conservation Commission.
- Kim stated the memo can indicate the intention of the Committee to edit the draft for format, condense and reorganize it to make it more readable. It is not absolutely necessary to make those changes prior to the July 10 meeting.
- Patrice offered to try editing the document for format, not for content.
- Kim asked the Committee to address the Selectboard's second criticism, the high burden on dog owners. The town is buying the property and it will have the same uses that exist today. A high burden is being placed on all other new uses. Patrice stated that the high burden was not being placed on all uses – new and existing – equally.
- Kate suggested describing in the memo the process of decision making around new uses like horseback riding and dog walking, including all the options that were discussed and consideration of public input.
- Ben suggested the memo mention the outreach and deliberation that went into the policy recommendations, and specifically mention the effort to summarize all the input related to dogs.
- Patrice agreed, and said that should be done for all the contentious issues.
- Kort asked whether there was a recommendation for appointing an ongoing Committee in the Plan. Melinda stated there was mention of that option, but not a recommendation.
- Anthony stated the WCC has had discussions about this, and feels they are not necessarily the body to make management decisions about Catamount, this is better suited for a separate Committee.
- Kim (stepping out of her facilitation role for a moment) added that the WCC wants to be kept aware of and understand the management decisions at Catamount so that Catamount can be integrated into the overall planning for conservation areas throughout the town.
- Patrice asked if this Committee should discuss making a recommendation for the Selectboard to appoint a separate Committee to oversee management of Catamount.
- Anthony stated that recommendation can be included in the memo if desired.
- Mike supports the idea of a separate Committee, and stated that it would be overly burdensome for the Recreation Committee and Recreation Director to assume this responsibility in addition to all the other Recreation programming.
- Kate gave some examples of how other towns manage town forests. West Windsor had a Town forest committee and the management later folded back into the Conservation Commission. Other towns have separate committees or Conservation Commissions manage town forests (sometimes poorly).

- Patrice suggested discussing whether the Special Events the town holds could be overseen by the Recreation Committee.
- Kim stated this is an area of discussion, either this Committee can decide to make a recommendation or the Selectboard can decide on their own whether to designate a separate Committee. A statement can be included in the memo such as: There are a range of options for how governance of town forests can occur. The Committee has heard from the WCC that they don't want sole responsibility of Catamount but do want to contribute and be kept aware of decisions.
- Patrice suggested discussing whether the different responsibilities be apportioned among town committees – for example, the Conservation Commission could be in charge of forest management, and the Recreation Committee could be in charge of recreational uses.
- Others felt that because these management areas are intertwined, dividing up responsibilities in this way could be problematic.
- Kim summarized the general sentiment as follows: the Committee would like to put forth a recommendation that the Selectboard consider appointing a Town Forest Committee, and has ideas for how the overall governance might work.
- Kim suggested spending the rest of the meeting discussing the summarization of the contentious issues and how decisions were made about them. Those issues include – dogs, hunting, horses, snowmobiling (?), grassland bird management, deer wintering area.
- Some ideas were proposed for how to frame the discussion (discuss community input first?), and what issues were in fact contentious. Some felt that snowmobiling was a non-issue as it had been resolved fairly quickly.
- Steve asked about the process and timeline for amending the plan.
- Kate said the Plan can be amended at any time, but at least every 10 years.
- Any user group can propose changes and they can be incorporated into the Management Plan at any time – don't have to wait for 10 years.
- Steve wanted to make sure this was clear in the Plan, so that user groups didn't feel they had to wait for 10 years for the town to add a new use.
- Kim suggested the following language for presentation to the Selectboard: the focus will be on the most salient issues, and there are a lot more issues that won't be discussed in the interest of time. Kim suggested summarizing community input and how it led to the decisions that were made. While for some issues, solid recommendations were made, there are two issues for which a framework was developed but no hard and fast recommendations were made.
- Anthony – memo can be an open letter from the Committee, explaining process of how decisions were made, rather than going into a lot of detail on each decision made.
- Ben stated the goal is to get feedback from the Selectboard, and to address that feedback so that the Plan can be approved.

- Patrice stated it is important for the Selectboard to know how each decision was made and why; those details don't have to be in the memo but can be otherwise made available to them.
- Kim asked Ben if he wanted another member to attend the meeting with him
- Ben said yes, help would be appreciated.
- Mike asked, are we asking the Selectboard for their feedback or presenting the plan?
- Melinda stated it's both; however, she expects the Selectboard will not have a lot of feedback to contribute, and the requested changes will likely be minor.
- Ben, Barb and Kim propose to attend the Selectboard meeting. They will make a plan of how to present to the Board and send it out the Committee beforehand for review. Kim and Melinda will draft a memo and send it out to the Committee for review.

2. The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 pm.