

Catamount Community Forest Planning Committee

Minutes of December 18, 2017

Approved

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

Members Absent: Ben King

Others Present: Melinda Scott (staff), Kim Coleman (facilitator), Kate Wanner (Trust for Public Land), Andrea Shortsleeve (Department of Fish and Wildlife), Richard Spitzer (Williston Hill Hawks – VAST), Mark Stannard (Williston resident), Nathan Kokinda (Williston resident, abutting landowner).

Note: The discussion as recorded in these minutes has been reorganized into subject areas for clarity purposes; therefore, the minutes may not reflect the exact sequence of the discussion.

Goal: Discuss and develop recommendations for integration of multiple recreational uses.

1. Kim Coleman reviewed the meeting goals and objectives, which are to make recommendations on multiple use recreation and review the COFC/Town license agreement.
2. **Housekeeping items:**
 - Approve 11-27-2017 minutes: Melinda Scott noted that she had not included all who were present, she will correct this. No other needed revisions were noted. The minutes of 11-27-2017 were approved as amended.
 - Amended meeting schedule and sign-up: Kim mentioned that the online signup sheet had “expired” before getting a chance to download it after Committee members had signed up, therefore that information had been lost. Kim noted that the schedule had been revised based on current progress and the need to cover certain topics, and asked if any members wanted to volunteer to lead the remaining future meeting topics. Anthony Jordick volunteered to lead Fulfilment of Social and Educational Mission.
 - No other housekeeping items were brought up.
3. **Update from Outreach Committee** – Terry Marron provided an update to the group about the open house. Almost 40 people attended. There were questions about impact to town’s tax revenue and sources of funding for the project. There was some confusion about whether there would be free access and what activities would be free versus what would be for fee. There were misperceptions about the value of the land and that the town was paying too much for it. Kim stated the outreach committee proposed writing an article for the local paper, clarifying various points in an easy to understand manner. People who attended were generally supportive and excited about the project. Other than the open house, the Subcommittee has been announcing the monthly meetings on Front

Porch Forum. Barb Evans stated it was unfortunate that the open house was titled “Q and A” because it would have been better to emphasize that the Committee was seeking public input. For that reason, Barb suggested hosting another open house that would be advertised as a “public input open house.”

4. **Public comment:** The three members of the public introduced themselves and spoke about their interests in attending the meeting.
 - Richard Spitzer, President of the local VAST chapter Williston Hill Hawks, is concerned about losing the option to relocate the VAST trail on the town forest should that be necessary in the future. He stated the VAST trail once ran through the Catamount Center land, but that the high traffic of cross-country skiers and groomers had been problematic, so they decided to relocate to a neighboring property and the trail has been there since. VAST would like to have the option to relocate back to Catamount in the future, if for some reason the current location becomes unviable.
 - Nathan Kokinda introduced himself as an abutting landowner to Catamount. He is concerned about the property being open to hunting and the safety issues regarding combining recreational uses with hunting. He asked if there are other models for hunting on town forest land. Kim stated there are other town forests that do allow hunting, and explained some of the potential options being considered, including restricting hunting to certain seasons and closing the property to other uses during those times, or restricting hunting to certain portions of the property that do not have trails.
 - Mark Stannard, a Williston resident, stated he used to work for Catamount and said that hunters on the property often didn’t know where they were. He also expressed concerns about allowing hunting, and felt that there are too many houses in close proximity for hunting to be safe.
5. **Overview of tonight’s process (Kim)** – Kim reviewed the decision-making process thus far. The group had the opportunity to post different options for recreational uses on the Google Drive site. Kim compiled those options into a survey, and the Committee members ranked the different options for each recreational use. Kim pulled the options that were ranked the highest for the members to vote on tonight. Kim reminded the group of the voting procedure using the 85% rule. 5 = I wholeheartedly agree; 4 = I agree, it’s okay; 3 = I’m neutral; 2 = I disagree but will go along; 1 = I hate this! A recommendation goes forward with 85% 4 and 5 rankings. There is the option for anyone to write a dissenting opinion if they strongly object to any recommendation the group has made. If members feel they need more time to discuss an issue, then it can be tabled until next time.
6. **Multiple recreational uses**
 - **Horseback Riding** – some members felt it premature to name certain areas of the property that would be designated for horseback riding; therefore the policy was amended to say: ***“Develop a designated loop for horseback riding.”*** Ben Norris asked about the length of a horse trail, how long it would need to be to have value. Patrice Maloney stated any length of trail would be valuable. Kort Longenbach stated

- that allowing horseback riding is fundamentally different from allowing dogs – horseback riding could generate revenue, whereas dog walking would not.
- The members voted as follows: #5 – 7, #4 – 1, #3 – 3. Since there needed to be 11 members voting either a 4 or a 5, the horseback riding recommendation did not carry and discussion was tabled until the next meeting. The members did not vote on the other two options related to horseback riding (restrictions during events and not allowed on groomed Nordic trails).
 - **Snowmobiling** – Richard Spitzer reiterated VAST’s interests in retaining the option to relocate the trail onto the town forest if the current trail location needs to be moved. Terry Marron stated she would be reluctant to cut off that option for future snowmobiling now, and have it forever closed. Some members felt they needed more information about where the preexisting trail on Catamount was located, where it is located now, as well as how the trail fits into the overall VAST trail network. When asked how wide the VAST groomer is, Rich Spitzer replied that they would not actually use a groomer through this section, but that it would be skipped over. There was discussion on the benefit to VAST and potential benefits to the town. Steve Page mentioned that as an abutting landowner he had not experienced any problems when the VAST trail on Catamount was being used. Melinda stated that one potential benefit is that the local chapter has been responsible about cleaning up downed trees on their trails and can benefit others who use the trails. She suggested potential language such as: “The existing snowmobile trail through Catamount is not currently in use. If in the future, VAST wishes to reinstate the use of this trail, the town will consider allowing that use.” The members felt that since they did not have the information and input from VAST prior to voting on whether or not to allow snowmobiling, they wanted to table the vote until after they had gotten a chance to discuss it. Melinda will write some policy language for the Committee to consider.
 - **Dogs** – The Committee voted on the option for the town to “explore the development of a dog park at another location in town.” The members voted as follows: #5 – 6. There was some confusion about this option. Barb stated that she has heard a lot of people expressing interest in walking/hiking dogs at Catamount (including at the Open House). Kim had indicated that she believed that the highest ranked choices presented at the meeting were everyone’s first or second choice; Barb and Jay indicated that the dog park was not their first or second choice, but was one of the lowest ranking. Barb asked Patrice if the dog and horse trail were combined, would it cause conflict, and Patrice said no not necessarily. Barb stated that it did not feel right that the town would allow trail for horses which would benefit few, but not for dogs which would benefit more people. The members agreed to table this vote until after they have gotten a chance to discuss all the options.
 - **Disc Golf** – The members voted unanimously (11- 5s) in favor of the following policy recommendation: ***“Suggest that the Williston Selectboard focus potential resources on the already established Disc Golf course off of the bike path in town.”***
 - **Hunting** - Melinda stated that either hunting by permission only or not allowing hunting at all would require posting the property boundaries. Andrea Shortsleeve

stated that a landowner can post certain areas of their property as no hunting allowed. Kate Wanner suggested, could the Town have only a certain area open, have hunting by permission only and limit it to a certain number of people, for example by a lottery system?

- Jeff Dickinson expressed a concern about the Committee voting on policy options that they did not have a chance to fully discuss.
- Steve Page suggested the Committee needs more clarity on hunting regulations. Steve asked about safety zones and whether they can only be located around houses? What is the buffer distance for safety zones? 500 feet from a house? How far from a road? The Department of Fish and Wildlife should be contacted for clarification on these issues.
- The members decided to table the vote on this issue until after they receive more information and have gotten a chance to discuss all the options.
- **Camping** – There was some discussion about whether this option should be combined with the option to allow RV camping in the parking lot, and the members decided to consider that option separately at the next meeting. The members voted to ***“Allow tent camping in the fields with prior approval only, during events and for groups like the Boy/Girl Scouts.”*** The recommendation was carried with 10 – 5s and 1 – 4.
- **Ice skating** – The members voted unanimously (11- 5s) in favor of the recommendation ***“Ice skating should be allowed for free and Williston should assume no maintenance responsibility or liability (i.e. "skate at own risk").***
- **Sledding** - The members voted unanimously (11- 5s) in favor of the recommendation ***“Sledding should be allowed for free and Williston should assume no maintenance responsibility or liability (e.g. "sled at own risk").***

Recreation Policy	#5	#4	#3
Develop a designated loop for horseback riding.	7	1	3
Horseback riding is restricted (i.e. not allowed) during events, including races and camps.			
Horseback riding is restricted (i.e. not allowed) on groomed Nordic ski trails.			
Snowmobile usage is not permitted except for ski trail grooming/maintenance purposes.			
Suggest that the Williston select board explore the development of dog park at another location in town.	<u>6</u>	<u>0</u>	
Suggest that the Williston select board focus potential resources on the already established Disc Golf course off of the bike path in town.	<u>11</u>	<u>0</u>	
Close property to all other uses and allow hunting for deer during youth hunting weekend (Nov. 4-5 in 2017), during the regular riffle season (Nov. 11-26 in 2017).			
Allow tent camping in the fields with prior approval only, during events and for groups like the Boy/Girl Scouts.	<u>10</u>	<u>1</u>	
Ice staking should be allowed for free and Williston should assume no maintenance responsibility or liability (e.g. "skate at own risk").	<u>11</u>	<u>0</u>	

Sledding should be allowed for free and Williston should assume no maintenance responsibility or liability (e.g. "sled at own risk").	<u>11</u>	<u>0</u>	
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7. License Agreement

- Barb asked whether skiing would be free if it was a light snow year and the trails weren't being groomed. Kort said he would need to discuss that with COFC Board members. Snowshoeing is currently free and on designated trails, and would remain so.
- Steve Page had a question about the Property versus the Licensed Area (just trails). Would the COFC need to maintain areas that are not trails? Kate stated that mowing of fields would be under a separate lease with local farmer. Kate clarified that COFC is just maintaining the trails, not the area between the trails, except in the case where they host special events. It was suggested that this needs to be made clearer and that the language should be consistent throughout.
- Jeff had a question about the liability of neighboring landowners that had COFC trails on their property, and whether they are covered under this agreement. Melinda stated that the abutting landowners that have COFC trails need to work out liability coverage with the COFC and that the town played no role in this.
- Patrice had a question about the section "Buildings and Structures." She stated that any structure proposed should serve a purpose for the town as well as the COFC, given that the town would bear financial responsibility for it. Melinda stated the Committee could make a recommendation in the Management Plan regarding the use and purpose of a structure, separate from the License Agreement.
- Patrice also asked about the section "Permits, Rules and Regulations." What regulations are pertinent to this License Agreement? Kate stated that the property is under an Act 250 Permit, and Melinda stated that for some proposed uses, town regulations will come into play. She stated Ken Belliveau will be coming to the next meeting to discuss town regulations and how they apply to the project.
- Patrice asked a question about the language in the first paragraph regarding "bargain sale." There was some discussion about the appraised value of the property. Kate stated the McCulloughs wanted that language in the agreement.
- Jay Diaz had a question about why "non-exclusivity" is highlighted on the first page. Kate stated that there had been some discussion about the "exclusivity/non-exclusivity" language as being inconsistent and that the language was being revised so as to be consistent.
- Ben Norris asked about special events – what special events are being planned? No specific events are planned yet, but Kate stated some potential special events might include a bird-a-thon, a disc golf event if a disc golf course is ever established on the property.
- Kate asked the Committee for feedback related to the term of the license agreement, stating that the McCulloughs were asking for a 10 years term and the Town wants a 5 year term. There was some discussion about whether the term

even mattered, as the town would have the right to terminate the agreement if the COFC wasn't successful, Jeff asked if there were clear benchmarks/goals for "success." Melinda stated that the agreement spells out that the COFC must maintain the trails and hold adequate insurance. The longer term lease agreement would benefit COFC, allowing them stability and a guaranteed return on investments like grooming equipment and rental equipment.

- Jay asked where does Little Bellas fall into this agreement, and Kort answered, the COFC has a separate agreement with them as one of their camp operators. The Committee stated they are fine with either a 5 or a 10 year lease. The Committee is generally supportive of the lease agreement as a whole.

8. Pedestrian Policy

- Melinda presented a suggested policy for pedestrian access and use, restricting pedestrian access during camps and races, and closing trails during mud season (April 1 – May 15). She expressed some concern that the policy might be untenable as written, because it's overly complicated. Kort stated that COFC generally allows walkers and runners on the trails during races and camps, and it hasn't been a problem. However, some expressed concerns that could change when the property is opened to public use, because not everyone is familiar with the race nights and camps. There would need to be some outreach around this. Terry suggested having an ambassador at the parking lot to provide information to new visitors, especially at the beginning of town ownership. Melinda suggested distributing information both on paper and on the town website, and erecting a sign at the parking lot with information on suggested times and areas to walk. Melinda will redraft the policy language to make it more general, and bring it to the next meeting for a discussion and vote.
- Andrea asked about wildlife closures, and whether this was the only opportunity to discuss potential closures. Kate mentioned that the group may also wish to consider closing the trails within the vernal pool buffer area during the amphibian breeding season. The group agreed to consider this during the next meeting.

- 9. Update to Selectboard** - Ben Norris presented an overview of his upcoming update to the select board. Anthony noted that he ought to emphasize the success of the public outreach. Kim stated he might want to list the policy recommendations on which the Committee has reached consensus, and note the areas where they are struggling.

The Committee members agreed to have 2 meetings in February, scheduled for February 5 and February 26.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:35 PM.