

Joint Sharon-Strafford
Selectboard Meeting
MINUTES (Final)
Morrill Education Center, Strafford, VT
October 25, 2021

Attending via Zoom from Morrill Education Center in Strafford: Strafford Selectmen Mary Linehan, Toni Pippy, Pat Kelly (Ashley Forest Committee member), Rett Emerson; Sharon Selectmen Kevin Gish (Ashley Forest Committee member); Strafford Town Clerk Lisa Bragg; Nicole Antal (Sharon Recording Secretary), AVC President Michael Sacca, AVC Director and Strafford Conservation Commission member Micki Colbeck, Sharon Conservation Commission Ashley Forest Committee member Richard Ruben, Vice President for Conservation at VLT Tracy Zschau, Regional Stewardship Manager at VLT Donna Foster, Strafford Conservation Commission and Ashley Forest Committee member JT Horn, Strafford Planning Commission Steve Willbanks; Attending remotely: Sharon Selectmen Joe Ronan and Mary Gavin; 4-Towns Coalition Coordinator at Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation Meagan Asbury, Orange County Forester David Paginelli, AVC Director Warren Johnston, Strafford resident and former member of AVC Gus Speth, Mark Black, AVC Director Suzanne Long.

1. Convene special meetings of Strafford and Sharon Selectboards

Toni Pippy called the meeting to order at 6:34 pm.

2. Final Consideration of Ashley Community Forest Formation Documents

Background

As background for the meeting, Kevin Gish reviewed the language approved by the two Towns during Town Meetings in 2021. In Sharon, Article 6 of the Annual Town Meeting Warning:

- *on the terms of a conservation easement for the property;*
- *on the terms of an agreement for the acquisition of the property; and*
- *on other terms relating to future management of the property with the Town of Strafford (owner of adjacent land parcel in Strafford), the Alliance for Vermont Communities, and the Vermont Land Trust and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board*

A committee of 4 worked on the documents that are presented tonight.

Forest Conservation Easement

JT Horn, one of the committee members, explained how the document came about, and things that the community showed interest in were included in the easement (forestry, recreation, school programs, special events, all are included and permissible by this document). Selectboard members discussed and asked questions about the elements of the conservation easement and

terms, limitations on use and access, the amount of the grant from Vermont Housing & Conservation Board to Alliance for Vermont Community (AVC), the role of selectboards in the management plan and resource management, the role of Vermont Land Trust and Vermont Housing & Conservation Board in oversight, the balance of conservation versus recreation, the towns' responsibilities for management of the land, options for exiting ownership by the towns, possible language that will provide greater flexibility for the towns and the possibility of allowing one building site on each parcel. A request was made for change to the easement language regarding the sole rights of VLT and VHCB to allow more flexibility for the Towns, including options to dispose of the property and to ensure reasonableness of VLT/VHCB decisions.

Towns of Sharon-Strafford Inter-Local Contract

Pat Kelly made a presentation of the intent of the Interlocal Contract document. Selectboard members discussed how the Ashley Forest Board will function, how funds will be handled, clarification that the board will operate just as all boards and committees of the towns, serving at the pleasure of the selectboard, including replacing members, compliance with Open Meeting Law, clarification of the role of selectboards for oversight. Additional clarification and amendment to the document were requested for:

- Request to add a quarterly financial reporting to both selectboards (possibly under 6(b)(6) or 8(f))
- Clarification on the management of funds to be managed by the treasurer in Strafford OR Sharon
- An annual budget to be presented to the selectboards
- Information on insurance liability in the event of accident or lawsuit
- A specified timeframe for review of the Interlocal Contract in addition to an option to review and modify as needed (3-5 years initially)
- Specify the reservation of rights for each town: add clarification about the Towns not being required to expend funds, each town can take whatever steps it needs to transfer the property within the terms of the Conservation Easement.
- Add language to explain that expenditures beyond the approved annual budget need approval by both selectboards
- Clarification of the VT law that governs termination of Interlocal Contracts
- Adding language about the new board that will have to comply with towns' policies (purchasing, conflict of interest, etc.).

Schedule for the acquisition of community forest acreage

Committee members were thanked by Selectboard members for their hard work developing the documents presented at the meeting. The committee will try to make changes to the Conservation Easement (with draft input from Joe Ronan) and the Interlocal Contract with the

amendment and changes outlined in the discussion. They will present to each Selectboard for approval at separate selectboard meetings. An interim forest management plan must be drafted before closing. Michael Sacca said that one was already in place and will be shared for consideration. No tentative schedule was shared about the acquisition of community forest acreage; documents need to be amended and reviewed before proceeding.

3. Adjourn:

Mary Linehan made the motion to adjourn at 8:56 PM. Toni Pippy seconded; motion unanimously approved. Meeting adjourned at 8:56 pm.

Submitted by Nicole Antal