

Ashley Community Forest Board - Regular Meeting DRAFT Minutes

Thursday 4-11-24, 6:00 p.m.

Morrill Memorial & Harris Library, Strafford, Vermont

Attendance, board members: David Paganelli, Erik Skarsten, Michael Sacca, Annie Penfield, Attendance, other, Kevin Gish

1. Call to order
2. Public Comments - none.
3. Approve Minutes from 3-14-24 meeting - approved.
4. Review right-of-way legal opinion. David reported that he has sent the Fisk and Ashley deeds and the 2018 survey map to the law firm Tarrant, Gillies & Shems and is waiting for a reply and opinion regarding the right-of-way across Deb Fisk's land. In particular if the ROW allows access for forestry and recreation as well as if improvements can be made to the ROW.
5. Update on parking area improvements. Plan a work day. Finalize gate plans. David reported that he sent a request for bids for the parking area improvement sent to Calvin Benjamin, Jacob Mayer, and Ronnie Johnson. It was sent last week and no bids have been returned. David will follow up in a week.
6. Proposed invasive plant work days. May 4, June 8, July 20, August 10 and September 14. The plan is to concentrate on the area contiguous to where the removal left off last summer, near where the log road nears the brook. It is quite thick and more mature than the stands removed last year.
7. Forest Stewardship Plan copies sent to each town. The intent if time allows, is to have them posted on town websites for the public to access. That needs to be confirmed as well as checking to see if the most current map(s) are posted on the town sites. Michael will confirm.
8. Update on forest management activity progress. No action as yet. David plans to walk and flag the boundary from the approximately the parking area south along the Nutting and Fetter boundaries to Clifford Farm Road. The flagging is in preparation to marking the boundary in red paint. David, Erik and Michael will walk the boundary on 4/18/24. If time allows, the group will scope out a possible trail location in the Sharon portion. The discussion jumped to trail maintenance and improvements to existing trails. Part of the bid with the parking lot improvements will be to install water bars in the road between the house foundation and the upper field. It was suggested that Sam Brakley from Sharon could be enlisted to give his opinion in relocating a steep section of the existing "Loop Trail".
9. Discuss Educational/Fun Programming for 2024. David suggested we renew the outings. Annie, Erik and Judith will work together on ideas and develop a program for the 2024 season. Ideas were discussed as follows along with the board member to follow up:

Solstice singing	Annie
Writing	Annie
Pride event	Erik
Briding for youth, (Silar leads)	Erik
Wilderness First Aid	Erik
iNaturalist	Michael
New Years Eve walk	Michael

A follow up to the last month's discussion regarding possible curriculum development regarding the history of the Ashley land including pre-history followed. Erik and Michael are going to work up some ideas for consideration and then contact Forest Kinder, a local environmental education outfit made up of Meghan Teachout and Eliza Minnucci. A budget item of \$5k has been proposed for this work.

10. David announced a public event at his tree farm on 5/19 and invited the board to attend.

11. Honoring Warren Johnston with a bench had been discussed for the last two meetings. A group of Folks from Sharon and Strafford have proposed, at no expense to the ACF board, to erect a bench in his name. Michael presented a short description of Warren's involvement with Alliance for Vermont Communities, (AVC), the Upper Valley Trails Alliance and with the Manning Farm Trail development:

Warren Johnston settled in Sharon, Vermont after distinguished journalistic assignments over 4 decades around the country. Following retirement in 2015 from his last full time staff position at the Valley News, he served on the boards of the Upper Valley Trails Alliance and the Alliance for Vermont Communities, (AVC). AVC was responsible for stopping the New Vistas Foundation project, a planned community that had it succeeded would have had an enormous negative effect on the communities of Royalton Sharon, Strafford and Tunbridge.

Warren offered his time and talents to encourage the communities to oppose the NewVistas development and to encourage outdoor participation by all. He was instrumental in the creation of the Ashley Community Forest and the Manning Farm Trail in Strafford. While on the AVC board, Warren helped hammer out an Interlocal agreement for two town ownership of Ashley Community Forest. He also assisted in writing grants for trail development, and he was always ready to roll up his sleeves and hit the ground to flag potential trails or to grab a tool to carve a new trail. He made work fun, appreciated the good times, and his dry sense of humor was sure to lift spirits and enthusiasm in board meetings and during work parties. You could depend on Warren to speak his mind thoughtfully and with grace and strength, though never forcing his opinion.

His dedication and activism with community concerns will be sorely missed. In an effort to honor the work and legacy of Warren, a group of friends from Sharon, Strafford and surrounding towns are proposing to erect a locally sourced and built bench in his memory at the Ashley Community Forest.

The board voted unanimously to allow the bench to be put on the ACF land, exact location to be determined. The local group will raise funds and select a local builder of the bench.

12. Recreational Trails Grant opportunity, due December 2024. David or Annie will contact the Strafford Town Grant Writer to ask if this grant can be developed by the town for ACF.
13. Fund Raising discussion. It was decided to hold off on doing any fundraising for the foreseeable future.
14. Kiosk location and info. The kiosk will be installed this spring, location to be near the parking area. It is two sided with the front side having a protective Plexiglas cover. Maps, rules, QR codes for direct access to town websites and possibly Upper Valley Trails Alliance, welcome, ACF short history, upcoming events, log of animal and bird sightings.
15. Also discussed was the gate installation just above the parking lot. Size of gate was discussed with 8 ft agreed upon. Possible reuse of old gate that was at the entrance before ACF was gifted to the town. This would be installed as part of the parking area improvement, and waterbars to be installed above the house foundation. A "No Motorized Vehicle" sign would be attached to the gate.

Outhouse situation was discussed. It has not been serviced for months and it is unusable. Keenan Haley, principal of Sharon Elementary School agreed to pay for the service but said they have not invoiced him and it is believed the company may not be in business anymore. Michael will contact Keenan and the last know number for the company. Discussion of a more permanent and better toilet was discussed. In the end, Michael and Annie offered to do some research on designs.

Future meeting venues. Since we will not have access to The Sharon Academy after May, discussion of other venues took place . Kevin said the Sharon town offices may be a possibility as is the Sharon Library, with the Morrill Homestead community Room bering a likely venue for the Strafford meetings.

Next meeting: at The Sharon Academy, May 9th, 6pm.

Adjourned: 7:40pm

Notes by Michael Sacca