

Ashley Community Forest Board - Special Meeting DRAFT Minutes

Thursday 8-21-25, 5:00 p.m.

Morrill Memorial & Harris Library; 220 Justin Morrill Hwy; Strafford, Vermont

In-Person Participants:

ACF Board: Erik Skarsten (ES), David Paganelli (DP), Kevin Gish (KG), Annie Penfield (AP)

Public: Malcolm McShinsky, Judith Falk

Remote Participants: None

1. Call to Order: DP called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm. KG asked for two additions to the agenda: 1) Review/approve agenda, 2) KG to read a letter from Michael Sacca to the Board. There was some discussion among the board regarding the proposed procedural change to approve the agenda, but the Board agreed to add the Review/Approve Agenda item to this and all future mtgs. **KG moved approve the agenda with the addition of Items 1a. Review/approve agenda, and 3a. Reading of Letter to the Board from Michael Sacca. DP seconded; approved unanimously.**
 - a. Review/approve agenda – completed above.
2. Management Activity Update: DP updated the Board on the following activities
 - Timber sale pre-closeout slash reduction 8/1 and 8/8: DP worked both days and KG assisted on 8/8. Slash is much lower now.
 - Mowing 8/9/25: completed by Sean Ward on 8/9/25 per DP
 - Timber sale contract extension approved 8/14: The Strafford SB approved on 8/14/25, following earlier approval from Sharon SB.
 - Timber sale closeout 8/15: The logger completed this work including cleaning up trails, pushing brush from the Sharon meadow, pulling loose/cut branches from trees.
 - Slash reduction and trail work 8/17, 8/18, 8/19: Landing was seeded and mulched, and waterbars installed. DP explained waterbars, maintenance of them and that they will reduce in severity over time. There was hand work on waterbars that occurred on Aug 17, 18 and 19, 2025.
 - MOU with Deb Fisk,
 - Permission to sign: There was discussion of the MOU that has been signed by Deb Fisk, with the inclusion of an additional paragraph. AP expressed concerns about the details in the paragraph added by Deb Fisk. DP stated that he was comfortable with the proposed changes based on already included language in the MOU. There was discussion about Deb Fisk's added paragraph to the MOU, including the request for gravel to be put on Clifford Farm Rd. KG stated that the Town of Sharon does not maintain Class 4 roads, such as Clifford Farm Rd., and that having the Town put gravel down on this road would be setting an undesirable precedent. **AP made a motion to have the Chair sign the MOU with the following modifications to the paragraph added by Deb Fisk:**
 - Replace "Town of Sharon" with "Ashley Community Forest Board
 - Replace "few" with "1-2 loads of gravel"
 - Delete "...depending on Town budget".**ES seconded the motion; approved unanimously.**

- The ACF Board may wish to request assistance from the Northern Windsor County Forester, Dan Healey: ES volunteered to be the point of contact with Dan Healey after approval of the MOU by both parties.
- Report on the Invasive plant work day (7-19-25) led by Erik: ES reported that the work day had 2 people (ES and KG). The emphasis was on scope in the focused area of invasive barberry. The barberry is very extensive in this area. ES also stated that he very recently got response from TSA and he will lead a group of TSA soccer athletes to pull barberry in the same area on Aug 23, 2025, 9am – 1pm. ES expects 15-25 high school students. The Ashley Board will reimburse up to \$1000 for this work, which has been budgeted for.
- Planned Invasive plant work day (8-23-25) to be led by David: This will happen in the Strafford side of the Ashley Forest as planned, and will be in a very separate area from the TSA group above.
- The Board agreed to discuss the future of invasive plant management at Ashley Forest in the near future.

3. Review Recent Events:

Recent Events (by David Paganelli): David read his summary of recent events to the Board and asked that they be included in the minutes (here included).

- 1) *During 2022 and 2023, the newly formed ACF Board worked to develop a draft Forest Stewardship Plan for the ACF. The County Foresters in Windsor and Orange County did extensive forest inventory to collect data on the current condition of the forest. Other local and regional experts were consulted, tours were led, reports were filed, and public meetings were held. Many discussions took place at ACF Board meetings about how to incorporate expert recommendations and public comments and what management approach to take. This exhaustive and inclusive process produced the Forest Stewardship Plan adopted and signed by all members of the ACF Board and subsequently approved by the Vermont Land Trust and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board. This approved Forest Stewardship Plan included a treatment recommendation to harvest black locust in Stand 3 and to follow that harvest with forest stand improvement.*
- 2) *The black locust harvest and ash salvage was completed in February 2025 and closed out completely in August 2025.*
- 3) *At the February, April, May, June and July meetings of the ACF Board the follow-up forest stand improvement practice was on the agenda. It appears that the February meeting did not have a quorum due to a community tragedy in Sharon and the May and June meetings were largely taken up by important conversations with guests Deb Fisk and Charlie Cogbill. Forest stand improvement was discussed at the April meeting and was briefly discussed at the July meeting when Michael Sacca asked about “tree marking”. It was clearly the intent of the forester assisting the ACF Board to communicate regularly with the Board about planned and pending implementation of the forest stand improvement practice.*
- 4) *Prior to the implementation of the forest stand improvement practice, ribbons were tied around approximately 1,000 trees that were deemed to be the best specimens in treatment area. These flagged trees were intended for release. The work of identifying the best trees and marking them with ribbon took place on the morning of June 10, and on most of the day June 13th. Approximately 19 hours of professional time was donated to the ACF by the two foresters doing this work.*
- 5) *Between the 10th and the 13th, an unknown person tampered with the flagging, taking some ribbons down and placing ribbons on other trees that were not intended for release.*
- 6) *On June 27th a team of four foresters donated approximately 24 hours of professional time to implement the forest stand improvement practice called for in the plan. The practice was implemented most aggressively just inside the Stand 3 and to the right of the trail on approximately a half-acre. The remainder of the treated area of Stand 3, approximately 15 acres, was treated more conservatively. In average the treatment was applied as intended and is in full compliance with the Forest Stewardship Plan.*

- 7) *On July 7, M. Sacca wrote an email to Kevin asking why trees were flagged in the locust harvest site. Note: this is 10 days after the forest stand improvement treatment was implemented.*
- 8) *On July 10, M. Sacca wrote to David asking for space in the agenda to ask about "tree marking etc.". David placed this item on the agenda of the 7/17 meeting as per that request.*
- 9) *At our 7/17/25 meeting we talked briefly about "tree marking" and it became clear that this was referring to the ribbons placed on trees to mark them for release. David told the ACF Board that two colors of flagging were used, pink and blue. The pink marked trees for release, the blue marked small trees that could be cut as yurt poles. The Board decided not to proceed with a yurt pole sale this year. Since the forest stand improvement treatment was complete, David offered to remove all ribbons but the ACF Board decided to leave the ribbons in place for the time being to act as an educational tool.*
- 10) *M. Sacca states in an email that he visited the forest stand improvement area on July 18th.*
- 11) *On July 21st Kevin wrote to David after a morning visit at ACF and asked about the cutting in the forest stand improvement area. He found the extent of cutting to be a bit shocking.*
 - a) *David responded to Kevin and explained that the practice was applied more aggressively in one area than was intended. While the practice was correctly applied, and the forester that worked in that area was not at fault in any way, David acknowledged that it was his responsibility, as the forester in charge, to have communicated better about the way we wanted the practice to be implemented. David accepted this as a mistake and apologized to the ACF Board for his lapse in oversight. David does not consider what took place to be a significant divergence from the planned treatment and suggests that it will have no negative long-term effect on the stand.*
 - b) *I ask that the ACF Board please pay particular attention to the inflammatory, emotional, attack language used by M. Sacca in his response to David's acknowledgement. Sacca says that David's contributions to the ACF as County Forester and Chair of the ACF Board is a "corruption of leadership". He may forget that the ACF Board elected me as Chair. Sacca calls my integrity into question by implying that implementation of this forest stand improvement practice somehow diverged from discussions with the ACF Board and therefore by extension, shows that I was somehow misleading the Board or being dishonest. Further, he suggests that I was trying to keep the forest stand improvement work from the ACF Board by asking "Was he trying to hide the fact that logging activities were taking place?" and by stating that it was "curious" and "inexcusable", that I did not update the ACF Board on the forest stand improvement work. This, even after our discussion about this work at the July 17th meeting. Sacca's baseless assertions and slanderous innuendo are totally preposterous. I resent his attack on my character and professionalism and find his actions to be deeply offensive.*
 - c) *Kevin suggested a Special meeting of the ACF Board be scheduled and we agreed to meet on Friday July 25th at the forest.*
- 12) *Sometime on or before 7/22/25, and within five days of the ACF Board directing that all ribbons remain in place for now, someone took most of the ribbons down. Since there were approximately 1,000 ribbons, disbursed over 19 acres, this was clearly a significant and intentional action. The ribbons marking the boundary in the same area were not removed, so it seems clear that the vandal knew the difference between the boundary flagging and the forest stand improvement flagging. While we cannot be certain who is responsible, I believe this was not a random act of vandalism by a member of the public.*
- 13) *On July 25th we held a Special Meeting of the ACF Board at the forest. David Paganelli, Kevin Gish, Erik Skarsten, Michael Sacca and Judith Falk were present.*
 - a) *The meeting began with the Chair providing some background to recent events. M. Sacca interrupted with an angry and profane outburst. Upon response from the Chair, M. Sacca moved toward the Chair in an aggressive and threatening manner. David interpreted Sacca's action as clear intention to do him violence and prepared to defend himself. Sacca collected himself, took a step back and glared menacingly at the Chair.*
 - b) *During the remainder of the meeting M. Sacca raised his middle finger to the Chair on two occasions. The Chair noted the gestures but did not respond.*

- c) *David finds it concerning that Sacca's threatening and inappropriate behavior was not noted in the draft minutes of the special meeting.*
 - d) *I pose the following questions to the ACF Board. If a member of the Sharon or Strafford Select Boards was to swear at the Chair during a public meeting, advance toward the Chair in an aggressive manner with the obvious intention of intimidation or violence and then was to raise his middle finger to the Chair twice during the same meeting, would this behavior be noted in the minutes? Would there be some action taken by the Board in response to that behavior?*
 - e) *We will consider these questions at our 8/21/25 ACF Board meeting.*
- a. Reading of Letter to the Board from Michael Sacca: As requested by Michael Sacca, Kevin Gish read Michael's letter to the Board (here included).

DP moved to accept the resignation letter from MS; seconded by ES; approved unanimously.

- At this point, discussion amongst the board diverged from the agenda.
 - Suggestion from AP to include more detail in the minutes and to document behavior in minutes. KG stated that minutes are meant to be a record of official actions; they do not need to capture every aspect of every discussion or emotions involved. KG also mentioned that we could record our meetings, but are not required to.

- How to advertise the open board position: In Sharon, all open positions are advertised and made available for people to apply to. KG suggests that we do this in both Towns for the open Ashley Board position.
 - Discussion about DP remaining the Chair of the Ashley Board (resulting from MS's resignation letter above): after some discussion the Board unanimously supported DP continuing as Chair of the Ashley Board.
 - Subsequent discussion about trails, trail signs and desired skillsets for a 5th Board member. No conclusions or actions taken.
 - The Board agreed to advertise for the 5th Board position after our Sep mtg and then, ideally, have a decision at the Oct mtg.
4. Discussion of what is, and what is not, appropriate behavior of ACF Board members: The Chair deemed this item not necessary for discussion by the Board and there was no further discussion.
5. Review and discuss minutes from 7-17-24 regular meeting and 7-25-25 special meeting:
- a. 7-17-25 Regular Mtg Minutes: **DP moved to approve; AP seconded; approved unanimously.**
 - b. 7-25-25 Special Mtg Minutes: **Tabled, some Board members would like to suggest changes and will send suggestions to KG prior to our next mtg.**
6. Public Comments.
- a. Judith Falk will repost the Invasives Workdays on the Sharon and Strafford listservs.
7. Other Business
- a. KG passed along that the Vital Communities funds previously discussed will probably not be coming to Ashley Forest.
 - b. AP mentioned possibly pursuing other grants.

6:30 Adjourn: **KG motioned to adjourn; DP seconded; approved unanimously.**

Next meeting. 9-18-25 at 6:00 p.m.
Sharon Town Office, Sharon, Vermont