

Thursday March 4, 2021

Meeting began at 6:33 pm

Facilitating: Laura Ginsburg

Planning Commission Members Present: Janet Wells, Brenda Fields, Nancy Chapman, Dan Ruddell, Shane Young, Israel Provocha

Public Present: Michael Sacca, Todd Tyson, Susan Slater, Scott Beavers, Eliza Minnucci, Matt Frost, John Echeverria, Sylvie Desautels, Sean Ogle, Mariah Lawrence, Baxter Doty, Kevin Rose, Fern Strong, William Family*¹

Review of trails discussion to date.

Discussion about trails survey

- Laura noted that the initial plan for a survey has changed due to need for more information and to build community knowledge before sharing a survey (the initial plan was to have the survey out before the third meeting)
- Survey potentially pushed back to late May
- Create a survey team later

Discussion on trails walk

- Brenda, Janet, and Izzy will act as trail coordinators - arranging times to visit trails with landowners and experts
- Discussion of what the walks would look like
 - Have subject matter experts join us to help us understand what is being seen
 - Potentially having the Selectboard and the Conservation Commission join as well
 - Potentially two walk - one with PC and other experts, one for the public
 - Timeframe: late April early May
- Possibility of an informational meeting to be held for those members of the public who could not make the walk
- Emphasis on making sure PC informs public in as many different mediums as possible
 - Discussion on getting a report out for the Tunbridge Quarterly (March 15 deadline)
 - A presentation at Town Meeting (May 22)

¹ *Unidentified, via Zoom name

- Some logistical issue with that - TBD
- Creating a pamphlet with information and FAQs

Planning Commission questions in regards to trails as we move forward

- What is the process for new legal trails?
- Who is responsible for maintaining them and how are they maintained?
- Did anyone talk to Priscilla Farnham about her experiences/perspectives in regards to legal trails? (Nancy will reach out)

Laura received answers to questions submitted to the VT League of Cities and Towns (they were received not long before the meeting began). The information provided answered the questions and provided links. It will be emailed to PC members and the document will be added to the PC webpage.

Next Steps

- Meeting one included hearing from RASTA, meeting two landowners; the plan for meeting three is frequent trail users

Other Business

- Where are we in the Town Plan process?
 - It is in the hands of the Selectboard who can hold it, modify it, or vote on it
- Brief discussion on what the PC would like to present at Town Meeting
- Next PC task to take up in the future is how to engage new property owners in town with town community life
 - Potentially holding an in-person gathering in the early summer to encourage new residents to become involved
- Local Emergency Management Plan is going over the school plan and making progress

Public Comments

- Baxter Doty
 - Runs the Tunbridge Snowmobile Club
 - Trails are important to the club and keeping them open is also very important
 - Need to keep the property owners happy so that they will allow trails to go through their land
 - Speaking on behalf of the snowmobilers, reliance on land access has raised concerns about unintended consequences of a policy decision

- Snowmobile use brings money to the state and the community and they are important
- If land access is cut off, especially the Dodge Farm, there is no good way to get around
- Todd Tyson
 - When a formal recommendation is submitted to the Selectboard is the Selectboard obligated to follow it?
 - Upon recommendation they can choose what to do with it (edit, vote, discard, etc.)
 - Curious about the Selectboards' opinion is on the use of legal trails
 - PC's job is to engage the community and provide information to Selectboard. Asking for Selectboard input would compromise their position
- Michael Sacca
 - According to the Town Plan, bikes are not allowed on the legal trails - what is the policy?
 - The Town Plan is a recommendation not a policy - there is no policy in place. In the 2013 plan it was a policy but in the 2017 plan it was moved to a recommendation
 - Can anyone ride on the trails?
 - No policies either way
- Nancy Chapman
 - Page 54 of the 2017 Town Plan it does say legal trails can be used by the public for hiking, which is creating confusion. On page 55 there is a part that notes the town should consider other recreational use (i.e., hiking, biking, snowmobiles). Seems to be a place of confusion
 - Understandable that there is confusion but it is a recommendation
- John Echeverria
 - Expressed frustration over bicycle use on legal trails and the role of landowners
 - His land is open to public use and a lot of public use it.
 - His tenant and wife fret over the amount of public use
 - Expressed frustration over the respect provided to landowners
 - There have been no problems with the snowmobile club and the people who use horses on the land
 - Will landowners be noted of a visit?
 - Yes; landowners will be contacted and all COVID guidelines will be followed

- Noted there are many other roads, including Class 3 and Class 4, that can be used by bicycles
- Todd Tyson
 - For more information and to see how the conversation evolved see the Selectboard meeting from August 16.
- Michael Sacca
 - Public right of ways should have been mentioned on the deed so there should have been an understanding that there was a legal trail on the property
- John Echeverria
 - Town Plan is basically policy
 - Discussion of public versus private access to the land
 - Needs to be some compromise between bike use and landowner perspectives
 - Not going to accept all uses on the Farm
 - Discussed landowner perspectives with that of the town and how to accommodate all
- Baxter Doty
 - Expressed his support of John and the continued use of the land.
- Janet Wells
 - Are Class 4 roads part of this?
 - Selectboard has specifically directed the PC to take on legal trails
- Matt Frost
 - Have to consider all interests when discussing this, including considering landowners
 - What is preventing other landowners from doing the same? (i.e., threatening to close off land)
 - Legal trails are public right of ways
 - If landowner threatens to do something if they do not get their way exposes the town to risk down the road
- Susan Slater
 - In support of landowners - have to respect their wishes
 - Why is 2.5 miles of legal trails such an issue?
 - Need to make sure that town is knowledgeable about conversation so they can make informed decisions
- Michael Sacca
 - In response to Susan:
 - Only 2.5 miles but are key connectors to one place or another
 - Keeps people off of 110

- If you start restricting uses it becomes a slippery slope - begin limiting it eventually the legal trails will be closed
- Should offer more options for the public rather than fewer
- Lots of models of public-private partnerships
- Should be no restrictions on public trails which could lead to more restrictions which could affect Class 4 roads
- Baxter Doty
 - Does the state have any say in this?
 - State has oversight and provides framework in which we operate but ultimately it is up to the Selectboard

Next meeting is Wednesday March 10 at 6:30 pm

Meeting Adjourned: 7:55 pm