

## Trails Committee Interim Report

7/2/21

The trails committee has held five meetings to date with steady attendance from the public. All minutes are available online for further review. Below is the understanding of what the Committee is empowered to do based on the April 11<sup>th</sup> Letter from the Planning Commission to the Selectboard.:

- *Understand seasonal issues and environmental impacts on the four trails*
- *Explore types and amount of current use of the four trails*
- *Develop communication strategies that support landowners and trail users (e.g., trail markers to keep users on trails and increasing pre-event dialogue/signage)*
- *Develop any trail re-routes that would ameliorate landowner and/or environmental impacts*
- *Identify sources of funding that can support recreational opportunities, including volunteer labor*
- *Work with trails experts who can assist in whatever way is appropriate for committee needs*
- *The Trails Committee will deliver an interim report to the Planning Commission no later than July 15, 2021 that will discuss work and findings to date, including next steps and opportunities*

Please note the committee is still seeking a member to replace Isaac Sacca who resigned.

In addition to walking all the legal trails (once opened again), three subcommittees were formed to focus on discovery. The subcommittees include: Ecology, Trail Usage and Community/Communication. The focus of each subcommittee is detailed below.

1. Ecology
  - a. Environment encompassing each legal trail, wildlife, plant life, human life, water soil
    - i. Current use and future use and related impact of increased use (by foot, by horse, by bicycle, e-bicycle). Data available?
    - ii. Input by trail experts to look at trails
2. Trail Usage Options
  - i. Research other towns (3-6?) about their trails
    1. Policies? No Policies?
    2. How is working? Not working?
    3. Process to get to this point? How did they reach this decision?
    4. Mixed Use Trails? Limited Use? Noting the areas of safety, agricultural impact and required management.
    5. Permits? What do they look like?
  - ii. Explore the Vermont Public Trails Network
    1. What is it?
    2. Benefits/Drawbacks?  
Does it fit Tunbridge?
3. Community: Legal trails a community recreation resource
  - a. What are reasonable limits for legal trails? Or no limits?

- i. What does this mean for Tunbridge community as a whole? Any decision needs to be based on ecology, community fabric and the cost/benefit for each.
- b. Landowners both abutting and beyond.
  - i. What kind of relationships does Tunbridge want with landowners? Adversarial? Collaborative?
  - ii. Is it possible to expand Tunbridge recreational resources in collaboration with landowners? Do we want to? If yes, then what do landowners need from Tunbridge-town/community?

Initial Findings to report:

- Early reports are showing that 3 of the trails potentially pass-through sections of wetland areas and the challenges for development are being assessed. Please let the committee know if further information is needed.
- Talked to key personnel at ten neighboring towns to assess their history and current approach. A summary of the findings can be provided. Legal Trails is a low priority for all of these towns and many consider this a non-issue. A couple of towns such as Norwich and Pomfret have utilized Ordinances for 10-20 years. The only example of a policy is the town forest policy in Randolph. Many refer to Legal Trails in their Town Plan or have a guideline governed by the Conservation Commission. There are good examples of trail usage beyond legal trails.
- Many residents of Tunbridge seem unaware of what Legal Trails are and the challenges surrounding these. Continuing to brainstorm on how to connect with citizens who are online and those who are not. Looking at a potential survey to get feedback with citizens who would not normally attend meetings or contact the committee directly.
- The public format for the Trails committee is a challenging environment to have frank discussions about the topics. The subcommittees are helpful to be able to focus in specific areas, however there is an interest to have full group discussions and it is difficult to be open about these topics when in public view. This hinders the progress towards a recommended course of action for Legal Trails.
- The group needs clarification on the timeline beyond the interim report.

Next Steps and Opportunities:

- Subcommittees to continue tasks and provide summaries for the larger Trails Committee
- Submit proposed paths forward for Legal Trails for discussion within the larger group.
- Finalize survey questions for broader community communication.
- Identify opportunities, challenges and roadblocks for trail development.
- Feedback on the timeline is essential for determining the next steps