

NORTHFIELD CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Minutes

August 10, 2016

I. Roll Call

Present: D. Wallace, L. Matthews, L. Hill-Eubanks, R. Barrett, R. Ruttenberg, P. Knox, C. Barnes

Absent: J. Pekol, N. Miller

II. Set/Adjust Agenda

Additions to the agenda: Whetstone property; conservation scholarship

III. Approval of Minutes

Minutes of July 13, 2016 approved and seconded.

IV. Public Participation

Guests: Louli Zeichener: clear-cutting along roadsides: Ms. Zeichener is a community member studying conservation issues, and was interested in hearing the Commission's discussion of the issues raised by the Select Board's recent proposal to clear cut 25 ft. from the center of Northfield's back roads.

Lydia Petty: Town Forest trails: Ms. Petty is community member who frequently hikes the trails in the Town Forest and on Paine Mt., alone and with her children. She expressed her support of the Commission's efforts to improve trail information through signage (credit to Nathan Ranker, Eagle Scout candidate). In addition, she commented:

- regarding the continuing concerns about mountain bikes on the trails, and suggested that perhaps an 'uphill only' rule on the Paine Mt. trail would ensure the safety of hikers fearful of the speed of descending bikers, but that for the most part, she feels very respected and safe as a hiker and has had no negative encounters; she is willing to volunteer her time for trail maintenance
- that people want to come to Northfield for biking and hiking,; additional parking is needed; trails should be welcoming to all users
- that she appreciates the mowed Cheney Field, especially around the apple trees where people can sit and rest. Pam Knox will contact the appropriate personnel in charge at the Town to offer this feedback. Some discussion ensued regarding a conservation mowing schedule, using post-August 1 as an appropriate date for conservation purposes.

V. Discussion

Arrowwood Plan

Commissioners discussed how best to use the Arrowwood document which is helpful in describing the natural inventory, and appropriate use, of the Town Forest. The Commission needs to work through their suggestions and determine the best means to make the document a useful guide/tool for the Northfield community in caring for the Town Forest. Several Commissioners have written reflective comments and suggestions on the Arrowwood document. Those who have yet to do so should get comments to Ruth **by the end of August**. Ruth will check with Arrowwood for a time to review with them the Commission's comments and suggestions. The NCC will then go through it as a group and write/re-write sections as needed. NCC needs to determine whether a separate user-friendly abbreviated document would be helpful to the community.

Town Roads Tree Trimming Policy

Three members of the NCC, Russ, Ruth and Christine, will be meeting with Danielle Fitzco and Kate Forrer of the Urban Community Forestry Program to inquire about policies/procedures used by other towns for tree management along town roads.

Russ Barrett acquired a link to an extensive model plan from the Canopy Trails in Tallahassee, FL. Ruth printed the ordinance and brought it to the meeting for review as an example of the kind of policy which can protect and preserve the grace and beauty of a given area. In Northfield, together with landowners and Trent Tucker, Town Highway Foreman, Russ has walked a couple of the roads designated for tree cutting. Some landowners wish to keep any cut wood.

Discussion included

- consensus among Commissioners that the canopy on the back roads in Northfield is another asset in the community, along with hiking/mt. biking, good schools, and an improving town center
- consensus among Commissioners that there are ‘legacy/heritage’ trees in the area that are valued by the community, including birch tree stands that are quintessential Vermont
- concern that there appears to be no written plan for tree/road management to guide decision-making, which can lead to dissension among Town leadership and community when decisions appear arbitrary
- that the Urban Tree Plan needs to go before the Select Board; Ruth will call Elsie Schadler
- information that the content of the document “Better Back Roads” discusses strategies to help keep lakes and rivers clean, using rocks along ditches to filter out impurities

Whetstone Property

Laura, Russ and Christine attended the meeting with Mike Bean, property owner, and Lisa Walker of Vermont Land Trust, on the proposed sale of the “Whetstone property” near Cabot Hosierey. Russ, Nathaniel and Laura walked the land. Laura reported that it would be desirable if the land could be sub-divided, as there is floodplain included. Commissioners agreed that further effort to obtain the land is worthwhile, not only for protection, but possible inclusion in a trail linking to Northfield Falls and Memorial Park.

Conservation Scholarship

Interested youth apply to us and the scholarship will be awarded for 2017. Pam Knox will put together a form for application. NCC should consider applying for another scholarship in 2018.

IV. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Christine Barnes