

JOHNSON CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
SEPTEMBER 9, 2021

Present: Lois Frey, Sue Lovering, Noel Dodge, Dean Locke, Peter Hammond, Jared Jasinski
Absent: Jackie Stanton, Denise Ashman, Carrie Watson
Guests: Brian Story, Casey Romero
The July minutes were approved.

CASEY ROMERO HAS A GRANT PROPOSAL

Casey is visiting community groups to relay the information that she and Lisa Crews are writing a letter of intent as a first step to apply for a Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaboration grant (aka VOREC). They have two aims: to build a bridge across the Lamoille that would connect the skatepark and Old Mill Park and to look at all the town's conserved land with an eye toward getting as many people on them as possible with new trails. She proposes a non-loop trail that would hopefully expand connections to other trails in town and beyond.

That is expected to cost roughly \$695,000 and the grant has no match required. The money is to cover marketing, planning, project administration, recreation programming, stewardship, wayfaring, consulting, and webpage costs.

If this letter of intent is accepted, the grant application will be sent. Winners of the grant will be announced in January, 2022. The work will be done by December, 2023.

Of course, the CC has serious concerns:

- Noel raised the issues of impact on wildlife and flood mitigation that would be caused by riverbank construction. That area should be reforested with a 100' riparian buffer. The Lamoille is desperate for buffers (see MISC).
- Noel discussed the impact caused by the presence of people on wildlife, pointing out that it's people who do far more damage than trash. A bridge and more trails would be a huge impact to an already impacted area. (see MISC)
- Any digging in Old Mill Park is forbidden because of the cap that protects the polluted soil beneath it. That may be a real problem in bridge building. The grant writing team need expert engineering exploration and need grant funded help for that.
- Sue and Dean pointed out that environmental protection should be an important part of any development plans. Careful planning was strongly urged by the CC.

Lois advised keeping communication open among community groups and that everybody must be part of it.

There will be more discussion with Casey if this grant is pursued.

BEARD'S RECREATION

Brian Story visited to let us know that the Beard family has registered disapproval of the way Beard's looks and that they'd like it "to look more like a park" and to have a clear sight line to the tables from the street. They also want trees and shrubs cut down along the road. Brian wishes to make concessions to them by mowing more and removing trees at the street.

It was pointed out that the Beard's sold the land to the River Conservancy, who gave it to the town with restrictions as to its care. The Beards have no ownership or rights to require changes. We have to be guided by the River Conservancy's management requirements. We believe we have been maintaining Beard Recreation Park according to the management plan outlined by the Vermont River Conservancy and accepted by the Johnson Selectboard. We strive to be consistent with the purpose of conserving biological diversity, wildlife habitat,

natural communities and ecological processes that sustain these natural resource values of the Protected Property.

Our plan for Beard's calls for mowing 5' on each side of the entrance path, which originates at the parking lot and has access at either stone steps or the new handicapped trail. This was done last year and worked well. It's not known why it was taken off the town's schedule this year. Hugh Albright arranged for the road crew to mow it once a few weeks ago but they botched it and mowed part of the hill between the tables and the road. As a result, people started walking there, which has caused erosion. We asked that a boulder be put at the top of that area to keep people off of it. The majority of the area is covered with wildflowers and shrubs, all of which are pollinators and wildlife habitat.

The case for protection of pollinators and the environment in general was made again by Sue, Dean, and Noel. We explained that fishermen want fish, which want bugs, which want plants, etc. In any case, the CC's approach is environmental protection. Our opinion is that we leave things as they are, with no cutting of live trees and the reinstatement of the regular mowing schedule along the path in early spring. We recommend removal only of the leaning dead trees near the picnic tables.

Dean suggested moving the picnic tables to the end of the handicapped trail, which might make them more visible. We can add a handicapped accessible table when possible or augment one of the existing tables.

Regarding the new handicapped parking sign and the replacement sign for the one stolen last year, Brian Story says they'll go up soon.

GOMO

Greg Fatigate will do the brush hogging with a walk-behind mower. He'll get the small trees that weren't done the last time it was hogged. The estimate is \$780 for all of the fields. A motion was passed to hire him, with the cost not exceed \$850.

Noel suggests we should look at blowdown along the edges.

Proposed road improvements and signage on the Waterville side of Coddington Hollow Rd. by Keegan Tierney and the Green Mountain Club: Brian Story doesn't remember having had a conversation with them, although they've been waiting to be put on the selectboard's agenda. Brian will look it up.

Kiosk: It's still in Dean's driveway. He'll call Norm Larow. Jared will meet Dean at his house on Monday and they will take the kiosk to Gomo then.

EAB UPDATE

A new video will be shot on Saturday by Chris Demars, starring Lois, an ash tree, and the giant EAB. This one is about how to save your ash. Copies will be sent to useful sources.

RECREATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

Put off till the next meeting.

JOURNEY'S END BRIDGE

Jared has been too busy to do at the repairs needed. He'll do it soon.

MISC:

- Noel points out that government is pushing trails and that a lot of money is going places without planning. There is no regulatory oversight on VOREC grants. There are too many trails.

- Lois wonders how we find grants that are more suited to conservation than recreation when thinking about trail development.
- Holmes meadow, located at the end of River Rd. West, will be acquired by a grant written by LCPC and given to the town for flood mitigation. The banks will be lowered and 1.5-2 acres will be used for recreation.
- There's been a bedstraw hawk moth proliferation on Plot Rd. lately.
- The state has bought the Plot Rd. parcel for a hiker/biker parking lot.
- Dean objects to anyone with a cat named Frank.

Adjourned at 8:20.

Submitted by Sue Lovering, Secretary

Next meeting is on October 14, 2021, at 6:30. Location to be determined.