

Strafford Conservation Commission

Minutes

September 24, 2024

Strafford Town Office 7:00-8:00 PM

Courtney Potter, Micki Colbeck, Kate Bass, Kitty Mackie, Steve Faccio, Erin Yunger, JT Erbaugh,
Mike Hebb

- Approve minutes from August 27, 2024, meeting.
- Kiosk discussion continued with no update on where it might be placed. We will come up with a proposal to bring to the selectboard. We will check Vermont timber frame website for designs. Steve, Mike and Sherm might possibly make it as we have the locust posts. Steve will ask.
- Trails update:
 1. Perhaps changing Whitcomb Scenic Overlook to Whitcomb Preserve might afford more protection from intrusions.
 2. Mike rerouted some of the trails through the Kahan property. Will is rerouting one on Paganelli's property for ease of marking.
 3. Micki noticed the Homestead Loop had many trees down on the upper part and it was not easy finding the trail again.
 4. There was a post on iNaturalist about the logging near the Fen Trail. The Forester, Andy McGovern checked the site and found no problems. He has been very cooperative and quick to respond. Andy said he left a bigger buffer than required. Micki hiked the route and found selective thinning with the tops left behind and wasn't concerned. Kate suggests that we go up and make sure the trails look ok when they are done.
- SCC guided hikes and educational outreach series: Anne's Pocket Park Celebration had over 30 visitors and was a great event. Anne will be a speaker next year teaching about planting native perennials. Next year Kate will do a spring ephemeral hike, Courtney & Kate will host a kid's creativity day again, Micki will do a walk in the fen to see ferns, mosses, liverworts and unusual plants, JT will do a long cross-town hike. Mike will lead the two orchid hikes, Kitty will lead a hike from Alger Brook to Pennock, and Steve will possibly do his vernal pool hike.
- Workshops on soil health, agroforestry, beavers, flooding, and more in October. Jennifer Byrne - White River Natural Resources Conservation District. Vermont Association of Conservation Commissions. Patti Smith, Beaver Camp in Brattleboro, Bonnyvale Environmental Education Center.

Micki will be attending a few of them.

- Miller Pond report: Parcel of land may be for sale by the town. We need to keep an eye on this.
- Stipend for Trails Manager:

Everyone reviewed and voted to approve documenting the plan in the minutes. Document is found at the end of the minutes.

- Sharon Selectboard's new chair, Scott Chesnut reached out to see if we wanted to hike or snowshoe with them at the Ashley Community Forest. Also, hike their new preserved natural area, the old Swett property – My Walden. The Upper Valley Land Trust owns and manages it.
- Next meeting October 22, 2024, 7 PM Town Office.
- Voted to adjourn.

Trail Commissioner Office Description

Approved by the Strafford Conservation Commission September 24, 2024

Trail Commissioner:

- The Trail Commissioner (TC) is recommended by the Conservation Commission and assigned by the Select Board (SB) and is responsible for the Strafford Trail System (STS). The STS is a group of associated trails in Strafford that are managed by one policy guideline and by the TC. The TC will be supported from funds donated to it specifically for trails. Extenuating circumstances may result in requests for help from the SB.

Responsibilities:

- The TC will design trails or approve trail projects initiated by other groups or individuals to be included in the STS. The TC will ensure lands crossed by the trails are fully approved by their owner(s). Some trails may be protected by easements and some by a handshake agreement with the owner(s). The TC will maintain a record of the person giving permission, the date given, and any constraints imposed by the owner. The TC will close or reroute trails, if necessary, when a landowner no longer wants to support it. Having no staff, TC is encouraged to solicit advice from authoritative groups or individuals when routing or maintenance questions arise. The TC will monitor land transactions and solicit new trail permissions as needed. The TC will designate convenient parking for all trails and construct and place signs for the convenience of hikers. The TC will also maintain a web site describing the trails and provide maps including geo-referenced maps to make following the trail easier.

Trail specifications:

- The trails will be generally open to all human powered travel such as skiing, foot travel, bicycle, and snowshoe except where other modes are specifically permitted by the landowners.
- Trails will be low impact in. There will be no terraforming or wide cutting widths.
- The TC must provide a hiker-friendly experience in every way possible. Dogs are allowed. There will be no signs with lists of prohibited activities. Wet or difficult to walk places like road ditches or muddy sections will have aids to ease passage. Trail designs must minimize sections that follow town roads. The priority is to create pleasant hiking trails.

Standardization and quality:

- The trail system should be standardized using similar signs with one color for blazes and flagging. Signs and blazes should be easily seen. Routes should be open and easy to follow with interesting attractions or views. The TC must maintain this standard over every mile of trail.
- The TC will be knowledgeable in current trail management recommendations such as NH Trails best practices booklet. No standing live trees over 3" in diameter should be cut. The TC will design trails to connect to other trails or showcase an especially attractive natural or historic feature. The TC will keep the Strafford citizens informed of new trails or closures via the listserv and an online website. They will also provide maps on the town's website and if possible hard copies at the town office. Trail designs must avoid or put protections through sensitive areas.

Maintenance:

- The TC will maintain the trails or manage a team of volunteers to do it. The TC will monitor the work of any maintenance volunteers for quality. The TC will do any trail maintenance the team can't manage.

- New trails will be well marked with yellow markers. They will be narrow and ungraded to reduce impact, discourage motorized access, and keep maintenance needs to a minimum. Most cutting will involve intruding branches or brush. Though trees may be used in marking trails, no markers should penetrate live wood. Paint or tape markings or separate signposts are preferred. The TC must ensure the private property is respected.
- In the past most equipment expenses for mowing and chain sawing have been borne by the TC. Requests for reimbursement for these expenses may be made to the Selectboard.
- The landowners will yearly get a newsletter update from the TC regarding the status and usage of the trail system. The town report will include a yearly update regarding the status of the trail system as part of the Conservation Commission report.