

**CONSERVATION COMMISSION  
DRAFT MINUTES  
November 16, 2016**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Byron Quinn, Al Alessi, Lea Kachadorian, Cyndy Kozara, Lynn Peterson, Bethany Powers, Bo Gibbs

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** None

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Paul Ramsey, Nick Mahood, Matt Stover, Jordana Jusidman, Seth Westbrook, David Murphy, Carol Moriarty, Finn Powers, Kyle Hansen, Leah Skypeck, Matt Bouteiller, Evan Kay, Seth Shaw, Bryon Lockhart, Stephen Schwartz, Todd Uvg, Rob Hansen, Matt Stout, Sam Segal, Ben Halley, Cary Agin, Tony Accurso, Cy Benoit, Gavin Vaughan, Cindy Emery, Tom Emery, Kirk Kardshian, Gretchen Czaja, Morgan Czaja, Charlie Kimball, Michael Brands

**I. OPENING OF MEETING**

Chair Quinn opened the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

**II. MINUTES**

The minutes of October 19, 2016 were approved as submitted.

**III. PUBLIC HEARING**

**A. T-4713-16 Woodstock Resort Corporation**

The application is for Conditional Use & Conservation District Overlay Review Approval to establish a commercial multi-use trail network. The property is located at 1489 South Road and is zoned Residential Five Acre/ Conservation District.

Peter Stover, 5<sup>th</sup> grader at Woodstock Elementary School, asked to address the CC. In noting his support the proposed trail system the following items were mentioned: he helped build some of the trails, this is a community effort, creates family bonding, is a healthy activity, and the trails will help build respect for trees and wetlands.

Mr. Mahood, the WRC recreation and nordic trail director, and Paul Ramsey, Woodstock Inn manager, presented the application.

Mr. Mahood read from a letter highlighting various portions of the application. It is true some of the trails pass through the wetland and vernal pool buffer areas. The trails were hand built without excavators or power equipment. Biologist Kent McFarland advised on

trail placement. The forest canopy was not disturbed. A letter from Mr. McFarland states the mountain bike trails as currently placed and managed will not cause undue harm to the vernal pools or the wetlands.

The trails would be closed during spring run-off and when the trails are muddy. Trails are no fun to ride in the mud and doing so creates a maintenance issue.

The trails are designed very carefully following national mountain bike standards to prevent erosion and to create a safe environment for users. The trails are not excavated and follow the natural terrain. Steep areas are avoided. The trail has a minimal footprint, 8" - 18" wide, just wide enough for a bicycle tire.

This past year, the first year, there were 400 users from May through October, which averages out to 2-3 people per day. There is a charge to use the trails. Users register at the Sports Center located at 1489 South Road.

Users would be able to enter from Lincoln Street but a season pass would be required to do so. There are signs noting this requirement.

Future expansion would take place at the Suicide Six ski center located in Pomfret. The Inn does not want to overuse the Mt. Peg area or create a crowded facility.

The CC noted concern with the conflict between cyclists and pedestrians, especially on the Town's Mt. Peg parcel.

Mr. Ramsey noted a meeting on November 11, 2016 with the Billings Park Commission went well. The commission is appointed by the Town to oversee the Mt. Peg park. There were no BPC members present.

The Town Planner noted the trails go very close to the vernal pools, in one case inches away from the high water mark. This particular trail leads directly to the Mt. Peg Park area and does not connect with other mountain bike paths.

Ms. Kozara noted human activity should be kept away from natural activity. This is the best means to protect the natural environment. She asked if certain trails that are deemed too close to fragile areas could be relocated.

Mr. Ramsey noted the applicant is open to suggestions and that alternative locations could be accommodated.

She also noted the number of bikers would increase over time.

Ms. Powers was concerned with the impact of fat bikes on the trails as they have a much wider and more aggressive tire track. It also makes it easier to ride on the trails, whereby trails could be abused in certain conditions.

Mr. Mahood stated trails would be closed during muddy situations, likely with a rope. Trail closure is also announced on the Inn's website and via Facebook and other social media formats.

Ms. Kozara questioned whether events such as competitions or large organized rides would be held.

Mr. Mahood noted at the moment such events are not planned.

Mr. Quinn asked about control of rogue bikers.

Mr. Mahood responded that the local biking community does police such behavior. If the Inn knew of such behavior they would speak to the individual.

Ms. Kachadorian asked what time of year would the trails be closed.

Mr. Mahood stated trails would not open until the middle or end of May depending on snow melt and drying conditions. Trails would closed in October just before hunting season.

The applicant would work with Mr. McFarland during the spring amphibian migration time to determine appropriate closing times for trails within the amphibian life zones.

Mr. Ramsey noted a rare K-2 salamander, an endangered species, was found in the vernal pool area.

Mr. Mahood would not prohibit night riding, nor would night riding be a common activity.

Mr. Ramsey noted an Act 250 permit will be applied for once the local permits have been obtained.

Ms. Powers asked about vernal pool and amphibian wildlife education. She suggested small inconspicuous signs that could offer facts and information about vernal pools and their associated wildlife.

Mr. Ramsey stated that is a great idea that should be pursued.

Mr. Peterson asked how long are the trails.

Mr. Mahood noted there are 7 miles of single track mountain bike trails and ten miles of X-C ski trails.

The Town Planner suggested a site visit would be very helpful in understanding the application especially regarding potential impacts to the Conservation District.

After discussion, the CC agreed to hold a site visit on Monday November 21<sup>st</sup> at 10:30 am. The CC will meet in front of Town Hall. Mr. Ramsey offered to provide transportation to the site.

The CC opened comments from the public.

Ms. Stevenson, Woodstock Area Mountain Bike Association (WAMBA) events committee, addressed the CC. The Vermont Law School attracted her to Vermont. The applicant is a good partner in that they have the resources to hire experts. This is reflected in the hiring of Mr. McFarland, biologist, to respond to the regulations stated in Section 403. She agreed that a site visit is important to view the minimal approach to trail building involved. Single tracks are narrow 8" - 18" wide causing minimal impact to the environment.

Mr. Kimball, Woodstock Economic Development Committee, spoke up in support. The proposal shows that the applicant made a careful balance between nature and trail making. Knowledgeable trail builders and maintenance people were used throughout the project. The trails will provide a way for young people to be involved with the local community.

Mr. Westbrook, WAMBA president, read a letter of support to the CC. WAMBA is a self policing organization composed of 52 members ranging in age from 9 to 75 years old. WAMBA is currently building and using trails on the Woodstock Aqueduct property. Previously, he lived in Idaho's Sun Valley that has over 400 miles of single track. He never witnessed any biker pedestrian conflict. Trail design is important. Single track has slower speeds so users cycle with care and sight lines are important to avoid collisions. Mountain bikers are serious about protecting natural life.

Mr. Stout, WAMBA vice-president, read a letter of support. Enhancement of outdoor recreational pursuits reverses population decline by attracting young families to the area. Single track trails minimize soil impacts and allows users to get up close with nature. Young members develop a strong connection with the environment that will last a lifetime.

Mr. Accurso, Fat Bike Vermont and Killington Bike Shop, spoke in support of the application. There are 70 mountain bike associations in Vermont. They all hope to interconnect eventually. Kingdom Trails has 100 miles of single track and attracted 150,000 visitors in 2015. He also supported the statements made by other WAMBA members that mountain biking and the environment go hand in hand.

The CC continued testimony to the December meeting.

## **B. Town Zoning Update**

The Town Planner discussed the November 2nd joint meeting between the Planning Commission and TDRB to discuss Town Zoning changes. The TDRB had no issues with the proposed list of changes that had been distributed. The request for a cheese storage and aging facility in West Woodstock was discussed as it will require an amendment to the Town Zoning Regulations. Unfortunately, Mr. Warner - the cheese storage representative, did not attend. Therefore little was accomplished.

**C. Wetland and Riparian Permit Updates**

There has been no action from the State Wetland Experts regarding the Meadow Ridge Farm LLC application. The application is asking for an after-the-fact permit to construct an 1,100' long driveway through a wetland buffer.

The Levins, owners of property located on Noah Wood Road - site of a formerly unpermitted excavation within a riparian buffer, have placed grass seed and mulch as requested by the Town Planner.

**D. Four Corners Update**

Mr. Fellows, TRORC, has agreed to conduct a brief workshop with the CC on the State's Natural Atlas mapping program. The intent is to do this in the first quarter of the year. Pertinent to the Four Corners wildlife corridor is the fact that specific prioritized data on forest blocks has been added to the atlas.

**IV. NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting is scheduled for December 21, 2016 with a 7:00 pm start time. The Town Planner will look into changing the date as some members are unable to attend.

**V. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Submitted by:

Michael Brands, AICP  
Town Planner