**\*\* Meeting Minutes \*\***

**20 June 2023**

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| **Attendees: (**Present = X) | | | **Visitors:** |
| Chair | Paul Funch | X | Bob Fournier |
| Vice Chair | Wanfang Murray | X | Ken Adams |
| Clerk | Heidi Charlebois |  | Wendy Good |
| Members |  |  |  |
|  | Kiirja Paananen | X |  |
|  | Harris McWade |  |  |
|  | Brittain McKinley | X |  |
|  | Stephen Legge | X |  |
|  | Richard Lynch | X |  |
|  | Jim Peregoy | X |  |
|  | Tom Montilli | X |  |
|  | Vacant #1 |  |  |
|  | Vacant #2 |  |  |

1. Called to order at 7:00 by Funch. Meeting held in The Groton Center, Room 102.
2. **VOTE:** Motion to approve minutes from 16 May meeting was passed by a unanimous vote.
3. Reports
   1. Members
      1. WelcomedTom Montilli to the Trails Committee**.**
      2. **VOTE:** A motion to recommend Bob Fournier to the Town Manager for appointment to the Trails Committee was made by Funch, seconded by Lynch, and passed by unanimous vote
      3. **VOTE:** A motion to recommend Ken Adams to the Town Manager for appointment to the Trails Committee was made by Funch, seconded by Lynch, and passed by unanimous vote.
   2. Trail Projects
      1. Nashua Riverwalk

Funch made a final request to DCR to allow the proposed rest areas as they are a minimal requirement for an accessible trail. DCR has not approved the rest areas and an observation area where educational signs would be installed. Funch asked if the signs could be placed on John Tinker trail instead. So far, no response has been received from DCR. New DCR Commissioner Brian Arrigo will be coming to Groton on June 30 to talk to Friends of the Nashua River Rail Trail about their maintenance/repaving needs. Funch will talk to him while he is here about the Nashua Riverwalk issues.

* + 1. Trail Maintenance
       1. Gamlin Crystal Springs has been remarked with new markers.
       2. Funch and two community volunteers cleared trails in Town Forest and Hayes Woods. Special thanks to Carolyn Wisnowski for clearing trails in Patricia Hallet, Hemlock Grove, Lawrence Park, Spencer Circle, and Surrenden Farm.
       3. Reviewed work done on the trails since the last meeting - Wharton Plantation, Hayes Woods, Gibbet Hill (general trail maintenance); Hayes Woods & Shepley Hills (chainsawed trees); NRRT (blew off from Broadmeadow to Sand Hill Rd.); Still Meadow (mowed field trails).
    2. New Trails Projects
       1. Casella Preserve: New parking lot has been constructed on Nashua Rd. Funch flagged out a trail route from the lot onto the esker. Some trails should be deprecated due to water and Funch is marking the proposed new trails. Three new sections of trail are being proposed. The proposed trail plan has been given to the Conservation Commission for review. When the Conservation Commission (and the Groton Conservation Trust that owns a Conservation Restriction (CR) on the parcel) approves the final plan, the Trails Committee will solicit volunteers to construct the trails.
       2. Martin’s Pond Rd. Trail

Funch and Lynch walked and marked the proposed trail. The trail needs to stay close to the road to remain on high ground except for one region where the high ground extends to the pond. There is a 2-foot wide drainage channel that can be easily bridged, if necessary, but otherwise the proposed route is straightforward and would only involve clearing of the path with no cutting of any large trees. There is a nice viewpoint near the pond. Conservation Commission will request an easement to cross two lots that have frontage “fingers” on Martin’s Pond Rd.

* + - 1. Harrison Ripley Forest: A proposal will be submitted to the Conservation Commission to develop a public trail through the Ripley Forest to connect the Wharton Plantation to the trail that runs beneath the power lines. Currently the established trail connection goes through the Black property. While the owner currently welcomes the public to use the trail, this is not a good long-term solution. As the Town of Groton is negotiating with MassWildlife on a CR for this parcel, this future trail possibility should be part of the discussions.
      2. Hawtree: Hawtree connects to the Torrey Woods parcel trail but that is currently a dead end. The Trails Committee feels it is desirable to connect Hawtree and Torrey Woods to the rest of the trail network at some time in the future. This would likely require a fairly extensive boardwalk of some type to connect with the Floyd parcel. As with the Ripley Forest, MassWildlife CRs on these parcels are currently being negotiated and so this future trail connection is being proposed so that it is part of the discussions.
      3. Brownloaf Parcel: The Town of Groton declined to sell a CR to MassWildlife because it would restrict equestrians and mountain bicyclists from the trails.

1. The Town is now considering transferring the parcel to the Conservation Commission. The parcel’s trails would then become part of the Trails Committee’s maintenance responsibilities.
2. The north-south trails under the power lines are in bad shape due to long-term ATV/dirt bike use.
3. An east-west trail toward Groton Woods is an old road but has been torn up by motorized vehicles and is very wet. Many “detours” into the woods have been created by people/horses/bikes using the trails to avoid the wet areas.
   * + 1. Water Dept. Parcel behind Chamberlain’s Mill Subdivision

The Trails Committee would like to modify an existing trail to Martin’s Pond Rd. to create a public connection from Martin’s Pond Rd. to the Brownloaf parcel. The existing trail has been torn up by long-term ATV/dirt bike use and part of it passes over private property. A full assessment of current conditions and the feasibility of connecting to Martins Pond Rd. via only public land needs to be performed to inform a proposal to modify the existing trail.

* + - 1. MassWildlife is also obtaining CRs on Sawtell and Groton Hills. The Trails Committee is working with the Conservation Commission to develop trail plans for these areas to inform the ongoing negotiations.
  1. 25th Anniversary Planning
     1. Changes to the list of 25 points of interest were made: Forest Bells (which have been repaired!) and the Skinner Forest Esker Trail near Whitney Pond were added.
     2. The details of how people can determine how to get to the 25 points of interest and how they can document their progress still need to be worked out and implemented.
     3. Murray and Legge will work on PR and packet that can be advertised in The Groton Herald, posted on social media, and handed out at Grotonfest. Prizes were also discussed but no decisions were made.
  2. Greenway Committee’s River Festival: Booth was supported by Murray, Montilli, Paananen, McKinley, Lynch, and Funch. Traffic was light, but constructive. Advice about good places for various activities was provided to visitors. A few more names were added to the listserver.

1. Discussion
   1. Expenses
      1. **VOTE:** - A motion to submit reimbursement request from the Trails Committee Gift Fund for 8 large and 6 small posts, totaling $604, and $15 for pamphlets for River Festival was made by Funch and seconded by Lynch. Passed by unanimous vote.
      2. **VOTE:** A motion to submit reimbursement request from the Trails Committee Gift Fund for backpack leaf blower repairs, totaling $229.62, was made by Funch and seconded by Lynch. Passed by unanimous vote.
   2. Letter of Support – The Destination Groton Committee asked the Trails Committee to support their request of the Town of Groton to apply for a Seed Grant through MassDevelopment’s Commonwealth Places program. The grant will support the Destination Groton Committee’s “Groton Gathering Project.” The letter of support was sent to the Town Manager.
   3. Grotonfest (Sept 30th)

**VOTE:** A motion to spend $100 for a booth at Grotonfest was made by Funch, seconded by Lynch, and passed by unanimous vote.

* 1. Liaisons to Other Town Committees
     1. Funch noted that some issues being discussed by the Planning Board will affect trails and he suggested that having Committee members participate in their discussions, as necessary, would be beneficial. For example:
        + 1. Gratuity Road - A plan to split a property will contribute to making a trail connection from Farmers and Mechanics to Fitch’s Bridge. The split will create a parcel that will be bought by the Conservation Commission.
          2. 63 Gratuity Rd – A subdivision is being planned that will impact trails between Gratuity Rd. and Jenkins Rd.
          3. Hayes Woods: A new development on Maple Ave. has plans for a trail corridor.
     2. Funch also highlighted the work of the Stewardship Committee, which helps with management issues for the Conservation Commission’s properties, because it deals with many trail-related issues.
     3. Funch will prepare a spreadsheet that will identify the Committees/Boards/Commissions that deal with trails-related issues and whose agendas should be monitored on a regular basis. Trails Committee can then sign up on the spreadsheet to agree to monitor the agendas for a particular organization and to attend their meetings, as necessary, to represent the Trails Committee.
  2. Stoddart Trail (off Long Hill Road) - Water drains right down the trail below the pasture and it has become very wet for much of the year. There is also another wet section close to Long Hill Rd. where a stream channel crosses the trail. Cost to mitigate the water impacts is estimated to be high (around $4K). No conclusion was reached about what the Trails Committee would do to help.
  3. New England Forestry Foundation - Corey Wrinn is the new staff person at NEFF who has oversight of maintaining NEFF parcels. Wrinn was supportive of a proposal from Funch to build four bog bridges. We will need to prepare an RDA for the proposed work and NEFF will need to sign off on it. Funch also talked to Wrinn about cleaning up the dump site near the Peabody St. entrance. Wrinn indicated that NEFF would put this dump project in their 2025 Plan.

1. **VOTE**: Motion to Adjourn was made and passed by unanimous vote at 9:07.