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

**15 August 2023**

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| **Attendees: (**Present = X) | | | **Visitors:** |
| Chair | Paul Funch | X | Bruce Johnson |
| Vice Chair | Wanfang Murray |  |  |
| Co-Clerks | Britt McKinley |  |  |
|  | Bob Fournier | X |  |
| Members | Kiirja Paananen | X |  |
|  | Harris McWade |  |  |
|  | Steve Legge | X |  |
|  | Richard Lynch | X |  |
|  | Jim Peregoy | X |  |
|  | Tom Montilli | X |  |
|  | Ken Adams |  |  |

1. Called to order at 7:06 by Funch. Meeting held in The Groton Center, Room 102.
2. **VOTE:** To approve minutes from 18 July 2023 meeting. Motion made by Lynch, seconded by Paananen, and passed by unanimous vote with one abstention (Peregoy).
3. **Reports**
   1. Trail Projects
      1. Nashua Riverwalk

Funch had a meeting with the new DCR Commissioner Brian Arrigo and Central Region Director Jennifer Stowe on July 21st. Funch also met (remotely) with DCR’s Interpretive Services Director Matt Villamaino, plus Stacey Chilcoat (NRWA) and Murray, to receive a tutorial on how to design the signs. But approvals to install the signs and the accessible trail have still not been given. Small grants are being held up as a result. For some grants, the money needs to be spent by the end of September. They will grant extensions, but not indefinitely. There has still been no response from DCR, possibly due to summer vacations.

* + 1. Trail Maintenance
       1. Trimmed trails (Baddacook, Bates-Blackman, Fitch’s Bridge, Floyd, Gamlin Crystal Spring, Groton Hills, Keyes Woods, McLain’s Woods, MS XC Course, Northwoods, Sawtell, Sorhaug, Town Forest, Watson Way, Wharton Plantation); installed picnic tables and built up stone walls around parking area (Bates-Blackman); mowed trails (Hurd, Keyes Woods, MS XC Course, Northwoods, Still Meadow); chainsawed trees (Longley II, McLain's Woods, Red Line, Rich SF, Sabine Woods, Shepley Hills, Skitapet, Sorhaug Woods, Surrenden Farm, Town Forest, Walker, Wharton Plantation); turtle sweep (Shattuck Homestead)
       2. Funch noted that trimming of trails is needed on many parcels and encouraged anyone who is interested to pick a trail and trim it back. Battery-powered hedge trimmers are available in the Trails Committee trailer in Funch’s driveway.
       3. The brush mower broke and was repaired at Great Road Farm and Garden (Agway).
       4. Legge noted that a fire was built on top of the first granite bench on Tinker Trail and left a large black mark. The bench also needs to be leveled.
    2. New Trails Projects
       1. Casella Preserve – New trails were approved by Conservation Commission (CC) on 7/25. The trail project to create new trails is scheduled for 8/19 (first of probably several days).
       2. Harrison Ripley Forest Trail Proposal: This will be discussed at CC meeting on 8/22.
  1. 25th Anniversary and Grotonfest Planning
     1. Press Release

Montilli drafted an article describing the challenge for The Groton Herald and a shorter one for Facebook. He also developed a graphic based on the trail marker that will accompany the FB post. Funch suggested the graphic also be submitted to the Herald for inclusion. Legge suggested adding the year to the graphic. The articles were liked by everyone. The Committee felt that the graphic would be useful as the design for the patch that will be awarded to those completing the challenge.

* + 1. Grotonfest Information

Montilli presented a pamphlet he designed that describes the Trails Committee, its vision, Groton’s trails, how to help, etc. The pamphlet was also liked by everyone. Montilli also developed two posters that describe the Trails Committee’s work and interesting facts about the trails and conservation properties in Groton. These were approved with minor edits by the Committee with kudos for Montilli’s efforts. The posters will be tacked up on the display board (donated by an Eagle Scout) at Grotonfest.

* + 1. Business card

Montilli offered to update the card information and put it into a format like that of the other products he has created.

* 1. State Earmark Funding
     1. Destination Groton Committee Visit

They quickly visited our meeting to congratulate us on the $15K grant that was earmarked by State Senator John Cronin in the FY24 State Budget in support of the efforts of the Destination Groton Committee (DGC). All surveys done by the DGC have shown high interest in the Groton Trails Network. Highlighting the trails more as well as making them easier to find and navigate could attract more interest in Groton in general. Indications are that the money is, in fact, to be targeted for signs, but the details are yet to be discussed with Senator Cronin.

* + 1. Ideas for Using the Earmark Money

The Committee brainstormed some possible uses of the earmark money: trail signs, trailhead posts, mileage signs, nails and other hardware, trail markers, educational signs (a limited number of special points of interest). Funch proposed formation of a signs subcommittee to design and order the signs once the approved uses of the funds are known.

* + 1. Consideration of Requesting a Budget from the Town

The Trails Committee has never had a budget. The money it has used has been donated from the proceeds of the Groton Town Forest Trail Races since 1998. But going forward, Funch suggested that the Committee may want to request a budget at the 2024 Spring Town Meeting. The Committee would need to submit and defend the request this fall. In addition to an operating budget for each year, we might also consider some capital expenses for maintenance equipment (“golf cart” or “Gator” or power wheelbarrow, small excavator, auger, etc.).

1. **Discussions**
   1. Stoddart Trail: McKinley has offered to take the lead on this project. Next Tuesday, Funch, McKinley, and Peregoy will meet at the trail to discuss what needs to be done in terms of gravel and bridging. Once that analysis is documented, we will get back to the Haleys to discuss the next steps, which will include getting approval for the project from New England Forestry Foundation, submitting an RDA to the CC, getting their approval to proceed, and raising money.
   2. Liaisons to Town Boards/Committees/Commissions: Funch reiterated that it would be helpful to know what other town committees and commissions are doing that is related to trails. The town website shows the schedule for all meetings. It also provides the capability to receive email notifications that provide links to agendas, minutes, and other documents that are posted by any committee/commission in which you have an interest. Funch indicated that we still need members to sign up for Planning Board (most important), Sustainability, Parks, Invasive Species, Destination Groton, Greenways, Town Forest, and Williams Barn. Two members can sign up for the same committee/commission to provide back-up coverage.
   3. Parcel Listing and Stewardship: Funch reiterated the need for members to monitor as many parcels as they can so that we know the conditions of all the trails for planning maintenance actions. Guest Johnson suggested that we could also solicit information on conditions from people who are not on the Trails Committee but frequently use the trails. It was agreed that a regular (twice annual?) request for such help should be sent out to our listserver. While we would not want non-members to do some maintenance tasks (e.g., cutting trees), they could help in two ways: 1) if you see something needing attention, say something (e.g., by notifying us via our interactive map)! and 2) help keep the trails clean (carry a garbage bag) and clear (using loppers or pruners or just by moving limbs or other forest debris off the trails). Funch will send a note to the email list requesting such stewardship and providing some guidelines.
   4. Priorities/Goals for FY24: Legge offered “wild” idea to make a walkable/bikeable path on Rte. 119 from Littleton to Groton. Many obvious difficulties confront this particular idea, but the vision is very appealing. Some alternatives were discussed (e.g., improving back roads) and it was suggested that other towns could be consulted who may have taken on this sort of project (e.g., Harvard, Littleton, Acton). The Committee also discussed applying this idea to the stretch of Rte. 119 from the end of the current sidewalk (across from Anytime Fitness) to the Nashua River. It was noted that the ongoing development of the former Deluxe Corporation parcel will greatly increase foot, bike, and car traffic along that section of Rte. 119. Funch noted that the budget for the state’s Complete Streets program was markedly increased this year and that Groton should inquire if any of that increase will be directed to towns like ours.
2. **Adjournment**

**VOTE:** Motion to adjourn was made at 9:00 pm and passed by unanimous vote.