

Public Meeting
Draft Minutes
January 26, 2015

Present: Glenn Seward, Bruce Boedtke, Tom Kenyon, Kate Wanner (Trust for Public Land), John Roe (Upper Valley Land Trust), Elisabeth “Tii” McLane (Forest Ecologist), Laura Stillson, Cathy Boedtke, Shelley Seward, Jim Lyall, Rudy Gross, Shirley Ouelette, Steve Ott, Jill Delaney, Evan Johnson (Brandon, VT), Perry Edson, Richard Bardwell, Jen & Bill Brown, Michael Bell, Kevin Kaija (Reading, VT), Peter Ferick, Owen Campbell, Mark Lather, Jack & Pat Deslandes

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the uses that will be allowed in the expanded town forest once it is subject to a conservation easement and a revised management plan. Laura Stillson talked about the proposal to acquire the mountain parcel from MFW, combine it with the existing town forest, and place a conservation easement on the whole property. Laura shared some slides and spoke about the recreational, economic, and ecological importance of the mountain to the community. John Roe from the Upper Valley Land Trust (UFLT) spoke about Mt. Ascutney’s importance from an ecological perspective and then talked about what goes into an easement, including a purpose statement and a management plan. John said in sensitive areas of the property (e.g. vernal pools), uses may be more restricted, while in other areas (e.g. the lower ski slopes), uses may be more intensive. John noted that management plans are generally updated every five to ten years. There was discussion about which of the upper ski trails might be usable for skinning and back country skiing. John said a non-commercial entity has to oversee the management of recreational activities; fees can only cover expenses; and use can’t be restricted by residency. John said “carrying capacity” needs to be determined and there should be mechanisms for limiting use when capacity is exceeded. John added that timber harvesting is allowed as long as it is in conformance with a management plan. John noted that the Community Forest Program requires the land to be 75% forested. John said typical restrictions would include: commercial uses, structures, subdivision, sale, clear cutting, mining, roads, motorized vehicles, manipulation of water courses, utilities, storage, dumping, pollution of ground water, planting non-native plants, and introduction of invasive species. Permitted uses would include: hang-gliding and associated structures; dispersed recreation (hunting, fishing, trapping, snow shoeing, hiking, bird watching, and wildlife observation) except during special events or timber harvesting, or when use is negatively impacting habitat; timber harvesting would be allowed except in ecological special management areas; invasive species control; back country skiing (off trail, on trail, and open area); recreation trails subject to effective management oversight including “carrying capacity” limitations; new or re-routed trails, subject to the management plan and UFLT approval; outside the intensive use area, narrow, closed canopy trails would be allowed below 1500’ in elevation, provided that there is little or no erosion; trail grooming in the intensive use area; horseback riding on existing horse trails; glade skiing; and snowmobiles on a designated corridor of minimum length to connect the lodge area to the VAST trails. There was discussion about grooming bike trails to a width of 3’ for fat tire bikes in the winter, and grooming double-track trails from the intensive use area to Mile Long Field for cross-country skiing. There was a question about whether or not individual trees can be removed to facilitate back country skiing. There was discussion about allowing horses in the intensive use area but not necessarily on the higher elevation single-track trails. There was discussion about the trails in the Mile Long Field area. Glenn said the town and the property owner have agreed that there need to be permanent trail easements in the Mile Long Field area to connect the resort with the town forest but we can’t engage

in meaningful conversation about the use of those trails at this point because the town does not have control over the property. Regarding the intensive use area: there are two sugar bushes on the property that would be allowed, subject to some conditions; grazing could be allowed in the open areas, but not in the forest; downhill sports including, but not limited to, skiing, downhill biking, snowboarding, sledding, tubing, zip lines, etc.; short-term temporary camping associated with events; existing water system, snow making, and telecommunications facilities; non-permanent structures associated with recreational use (e.g. warming hut); half pipes; the existing ski lift; additional surface lifts (e.g. J-bar or T-bar); parking; alternative energy structures (e.g. solar panels), a temporary pad for power, and a DHART landing pad in the existing parking area. The old base lodge will be on a separate parcel, not covered by the easement. Outside the intensive use area, the only structures allowed would be erosion control structures, bridges, parking, kiosks, water tanks, a hang gliding launch, pre-existing tree stands, and signs. There was a question about re-building the existing cabin or building a lean-to structure. Regarding events, participants may use the existing trail system but all other activities would take place within the intensive use area. John said the type, size and frequency of events should be addressed in the management plan and should not impact protected ecological areas. Additional comments may be submitted to Martha Harrison at town.of.west.windsor@valley.net Kate said before the management plan is finalized, it will be posted on the town website so people can comment on it, probably a couple of months from now. The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Harrison