

West Windsor Selectboard
West Windsor Town Forest Committee
West Windsor Conservation Commission
Draft Minutes
January 19, 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), Sue Greenall, Al Keiller, Laura Stillson, Cathy Boedtke, Barbara Gerstner, Shelley Seward, Mark Nowlan, Shirley Ouelette, Dennis Lemire, Ted Siegler, Jim Lyall, Rudy Gross, Dennis Erikson, Natalie Starr, Martha Harrison

1. Call to Order – Selectboard Chair Glenn Seward called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM. The Selectboard, Town Forest Committee, and Conservation Commission had quorums present. Those present introduced themselves.
2. Changes or Additions – None
3. Announcements/Public Comment – None
4. Meet with Trust for Public Land (TPL) and Upper Valley Land Trust (UVLT) to discuss Town Forest Conservation Easement - Kate Wanner from the Trust for Public Land (TPL) reviewed the timeline for the acquisition of the Ascutney Mountain property, noting that there will be public meetings on January 26th and February 5th; the Community Forest Program (CFP) grant application is due on February 12th; the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board (VHCB) grant application is due on March 6th; and a private fundraising campaign will begin in mid-March. Kate said VHCB will make a decision on the grant application on May 8th, and CFP will make a decision on June 1st. A conservation easement between the Upper Valley Land Trust (UVLT), VHCB, and the Town needs to be finalized by June 15th and signed at closing. If all funds have been received or pledged by July 10th, TPL will exercise its purchase option with MFW Associates on July 15th, with a closing date of August 15th. John Roe from the UVLT talked about conservation easements and why Ascutney is an important property to conserve: it has large unfragmented forest blocks, it has a mix of higher elevation and lower elevation species and habitats, it is known as an "ecological hot spot" with many natural communities, and it is surrounded by other properties that are similarly conserved. John then talked about the different parts of an easement, which include a purpose statement, objectives, a management plan, special management areas, and provisions for monitoring. Those present then discussed potential goals for the property including: recreational opportunities and related non-commercial economic development opportunities, habitat preservation, sustainable forestry practices, public access, and drinking water protection. More specific uses discussed included: back-country and "glade" skiing, cross-country skiing, downhill skiing, mountain biking, lift-serve mountain biking, snow biking, horseback riding, special events, timber harvesting, sugaring, livestock grazing, hiking, tubing, hang-gliding, hunting, fishing, trapping, zip lines, an adventure course and a snowmobile trail connecting to the VAST system. Some questions arose and some comments were made. Jim Lyall wondered if all potential lift-serve mountain bike trails have to be identified and designed before the easement is signed. Kate noted that the property has to remain 75% forested in perpetuity. A question arose as to whether selective timber harvesting would reduce the percentage of forest cover, and whether glade skiing areas would be considered "forested." In

other words, how dense does the forest cover have to be to be considered forested? There was discussion about allowing grazing in open areas to keep them open. The town is allowed to make money on things like day-use ticket sales and timber harvesting as long as the funds are used to maintain the property; the town is not allowed to make a profit. Kate had several studies that she will make available to the public; one was done by the Audubon Society, and two were done by UVM students. There was discussion about the mismanagement of the prison farm property and general agreement that no one wants to see that happen with the town forest. Glenn said he envisions a non-profit organization, licensed by the town, managing the day-to-day recreational use of the property while the Town Forest Committee continues to advise the Selectboard on the non-recreational management of the forest. Tom and Bruce agreed, noting that the details will need to be worked out. There was discussion about the Act 250 permits associated with the town forest and the resort property and the need to continue to comply with those permits after the easement is in place. There was discussion about making allowance for the continued use of the existing stump dump. John noted that any “bootleg” trails will need to be closed. John said it is his opinion that horses spread invasive plant species. As a result, John suggested keeping horse trails lower down on the mountain and addressing the control of invasive species in the management plan. Sue Greenall expressed an alternate viewpoint. Tom noted that some trees in the town forest are older than the town and said the management plan should prohibit the cutting of old trees. John said the hang-gliding platform will be treated as a special recreational area. Laura asked if cell towers would be allowed on the property. Kate said the cell tower would be in the base lodge area. Kate asked if the town would support solar panels in the parking area. Several of those present said they would. There was discussion about the need to estimate the comfortable carrying capacity of the bike trails. Kate suggested allowing different uses on different days to avoid conflicts between bikers and horseback riders, for example.

5. Other Business – None
6. Adjourn – **Glenn moved to adjourn at 8:45 PM. Tom seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Harrison