

WEST WINDSOR SELECTBOARD

Draft Minutes

June 21, 2011

Present: Glenn Seward, Bruce Boedtke, Cathy Boedtke, Martha Harrison, Jim & Joy Axten, Brian Bevacqua, Jim Lyall, Rudy Gross, Phil Arvidson, Dennis & Tammy Conley, Dennis & Betty Lemire, Ted Siegler, John Zelig, Glenn Heitsmith

- 1) Call to Order – Selectboard Chair Glenn Seward called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM and summarized the efforts of the Selectboard, the Town Forest Committee and STAB to open recreational trails on town and resort property to stimulate the local economy in light of the ski area closing. Glenn said the Selectboard needs feedback to help them determine whether they should continue to pursue this concept. Glenn mentioned lift-serve mountain biking as another potential off-season resort activity. Glenn said increasing the number of visitors to the area will increase the traffic in the town forest. Glenn said start-up costs associated with this project are between \$7,000 and \$8,000 for signage, maps and additional work by the Forest Ecologist. Glenn estimated annual maintenance costs as being between \$2,500 and \$3,500. Glenn said the Selectboard has agreements that are ready to be signed with Orange Lake, Snowdance and STAB. Glenn said the bigger question, which can't be answered tonight, is "What are the goals of the community? Do we want an active, vibrant village center? Or do we like the town quiet with a few residences along the main drag?" Glenn said if this concept is having a negative impact on the forest and/or the town, we can always make changes. Jim Axten asked about the impact on the back roads and noted that horses and bikes don't always get along because cyclists don't know how to approach horses. Glenn said bikers prefer to ride on single-track trails. Glenn said there may be horse traffic on the double-track trails in the town forest but he doesn't think there will be much bicycle traffic on the back roads. Jim Lyall said if we promote our trail system, we're going to get mountain bikers who want to ride on trails not roads. Jim Lyall acknowledged that there are bikers who like to ride on dirt roads but promoting our trail system is not going to attract them. Joy Axten said she is concerned by the number of visitors who are visiting the trail system in Rutland, and concerned that an influx of people will change the character of the town. Joy said she is not against the concept but she feels like the Selectboard is moving too fast. Joy said cyclists don't know how to approach horses. Rudy suggested signage to notify bikers how to approach horses. Rudy thinks the use of the town forest is going to increase gradually. Glenn agreed that he expects the increase to be gradual, which will enable concerns to be addressed as they arise. Jim Lyall said he thinks many of the visitors to the Rutland trails are local. Jim Lyall said there are plans for signage. Jim added that West Windsor's existing trails are known as being difficult so new trails are being developed for beginners. Rudy asked if there is anything in writing that would allow the town to continue using the trails on resort property if the resort is sold. Glenn said the current owners have agreed to pass the agreements along but it will be up to the new owners whether they want to continue with the agreements. Glenn said the agreement with Orange Lake is month to month because they want the opportunity to tweak it if necessary. Glenn said he has spoken with two potential new resort owners and both are interested in keeping the trail system alive. Rudy said he is concerned about putting tax money into something that we may have to give up in six months. Glenn said because it's a small amount of money to invest and it could have a big positive impact on the community, the Selectboard is prepared to take that risk. Glenn said because we lack adequate parking and beginner terrain in the town forest, the Selectboard felt it would be prudent to sign an agreement with the resort owners. Cathy said the folks at Orange Lake and Rivers Northeast Adventures could help educate bikers about how to interact with horses if we give them the information. Glenn agreed and noted that Orange Lake has been very supportive. Glenn said Brownsville General Store is supportive as well. Brian said Rivers Northeast Adventures gives out maps and tells people who rent bikes from them about

talking to horses. Brian said they rent both mountain bikes and hybrids. Joy asked if they provide road maps of Brownsville. Brian said yes. Joy said we're not just talking about the mountain then; we're talking about all of West Windsor. Joy asked how taxpayer money will be spent. Glenn said the town's insurance company has requested that appropriate signage is in place and there are costs associated with maps, mowing, and trail construction. Glenn said the money would either come from the town forest fund or from the 2010 surplus so there would be no increase in taxes. Dennis said he is in favor of this plan because the town needs economic growth. Bruce said there are ways to control growth - by limiting parking, for example. Bruce said all ski areas are interested in having activities year-round. Bruce also said the investment in signs and a kiosk would not be wasted because those things can be removed and put in another location. Rudy said if we build trails on resort property and then lose those trails, we may also lose the people who were coming here. Bruce said he thinks the risk of that is very low; ski areas are looking for ways to attract visitors in the summer. Joy asked if there is going to be a charge for the use of the trails. Rudy said no. Joy said if there's no charge, then there's no liability. Glenn agreed that there's no liability and said that he has confirmed that with the town's insurance company and the town attorney. Joy reiterated her concerns about rapid growth. Glenn said the Selectboard will manage the growth. With regard to the number of visitors to Pine Hill Park, Glenn said Rutland is the second largest city in the state. Jim Lyall asked about the number of skiers coming to Mt. Ascutney thirty years ago. Glenn said in the late 1970s, there were skier visits of 60,000+ per year. Over the last few years, skier visits have been in the 10,000 to 20,000 range. Rudy said some problems can be addressed with signage. Cathy said she thinks the trail system is a good thing for the community and could help attract young people to the community. Joy said West Windsor is a wealthier community and a lot of young people want to come here for the scenic beauty, the trails and the school, but most young people can't afford it. Bruce said West Windsor is a half hour drive from Dartmouth and having trails could help attract the young professionals who can afford to move here. Ted said the trail system would also benefit Windsor and the surrounding communities. Glenn agreed that it's important to support the plans for additional trails in Windsor and Hartland. Rudy asked if there are plans for a connecting link to the state park. Jim Lyall said there is a proposal that has been in process for three years. Jim said eventually STAB (Sports Trails of the Ascutney Basin) would like to have a trail going all the way around the mountain. Jim said the state is also interested in having STAB build some trails at the entrance to the state park. Phil said he thinks this is something the town should pursue. Dennis Lemire asked if there are going to be any more informational meetings and when the Selectboard plans to sign the agreements. Glenn said he had not planned on any more meetings but this topic will be discussed at regular Selectboard meetings. Dennis asked why the Orange Lake agreement is limited to 30 days. Glenn said Orange Lake has said that the agreement will be presumptively renewed but it gives them an "out" if they find a reason to dislike this whole thing. Dennis said Orange Lake would be one of the primary beneficiaries because they have lodging and food. Glenn said Orange Lake has been very supportive and has the expertise to help with marketing. Dennis noted that they are leasing space to a bike rental company. Glenn agreed that it's in their best interest to have this continue. Jim Axten asked if Orange Lake has provided any funds for trail building. Glenn said they have not - except through their tax dollars. Glenn said the Selectboard is committed to doing whatever it takes to make this work.

- 2) Adjourn – **The Selectboard adjourned by consensus at 8:35 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Harrison