

## WEST WINDSOR SELECTBOARD

Draft Minutes

May 23, 2011

Present: Glenn Seward, Bruce Boedtke, Tom Kenyon, Jason Rasmussen, Arthur Steinberg, Dennis & Betty Lemire, Cathy Boedtke, Jerry & Shirley Ouelette, John Taylor, Todd Uva, Liz Weber, Mike Skalla, Dennis & Tammy Conley, Ken Parrot, Rudy Gross, Courtney McKaig, Jim Lyall, Chris & Nancy Nesbitt, Barbara Gerstner, Lee Monro, Erik Schutz, Mark Isenberg, Amy Yates, Deb Shearer, Joy Axten, Laura Stillson, John Zelig, Martha Harrison

Guest speakers: Mike Smith (Pine Hill Park, Rutland), Patrick Kell (VT Mtn. Bike Assoc.)

- 1) Call to Order – Selectboard Chair Glenn Seward called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM and gave an overview of the Selectboard's progress in exploring the possibility of expanding West Windsor's mountain bike trails to improve the economic viability of the town. Glenn mentioned the Kingdom Trails in Burke, VT as one potential model, and said he has been discussing the issue with the current owners of the Resort. Glenn also mentioned the possibility of a future trail connecting West Windsor's trails to the Ascutney State Park. Glenn said the Selectboard is working on an agreement with STAB (Sports Trails of the Ascutney Basin) to oversee the trail system. According to Glenn, no additional trail construction is planned for the town forest until a new management plan is in place.
- 2) Mike Smith gave a presentation on the development of mountain bike trails in Pine Hill Park in Rutland. Some of the information included in his presentation: Rutland has embraced the trail system and the trail system has benefited the community in many ways – social, economic and recreational. Trails help get kids outside, away from the TV and help combat childhood obesity. Pine Hill Park, which is owned by the city of Rutland, has 300 acres, 16 miles of single-track trail, 19 bridges (including serpentine, drop & suspension bridges), and 33,000 visitors per year. Most trails in Pine Hill Park are beginner to intermediate level. Visiting trail users are healthy, well-educated, responsible people. Visitors typically have a meal, fill up their gas tank and sometimes spend the night in the area. Trails are designed to be fun and durable and are used year 'round for hiking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing as well as mountain biking. Many different groups of volunteers – high school students, master gardeners, eagle scouts, CVPS and GE employees – help build and maintain the trails, and volunteer labor often counts as matching funds for grants. The trails are well built, well marked and well maintained. Trail construction and maintenance is difficult work but if trails are built properly to begin with, not much maintenance is needed. The Pine Hill Park trail system has never used any city funds; funding has come from grants (e.g. federal highway grants, trails and greenways grants). The Mayor of Rutland, the Board of Aldermen, and the CEO of Rutland Regional Medical Center all love the Pine Hill Park project. Publicity, other than word-of-mouth, is not really necessary although Pine Hill Park was recently featured in the Boston Globe Sunday travel section, and in a documentary film presented at the Tribeca film festival. Mountain biking could have the same positive impact on Vermont's economy in the summer that snowmobiling has in the winter. Recreational trails are in high demand and help attract younger people to Vermont. Realtors love recreational trails. As far as insurance is concerned, towns fall under sovereign immunity. In addition, Vermont's limited landowner liability act has been tested in court and has held up. Landowners have the right to change their mind about allowing trails on their property. Jim Lyall has considerable trail design expertise and, as a result, West Windsor has a beautiful trail system. West Windsor is also well positioned in relation to Boston and already produces one of the most renowned cycling events in the northeast (the Vermont 50). The winner of the VT 50 recently told Mike that West Windsor's trails are among the best in Vermont.
- 3) Patrick Kell, Executive Director of the Vermont Mountain Bike Association (VMBA), gave a presentation. Some of the key points from Patrick's presentation: VMBA has 20 chapters in

Vermont, including STAB (Sports Trails of the Ascutney Basin) and Pine Hill Park. In 2010, VMBA was awarded \$200,000 by the Forest Service to build trails in the Moosalamoo National Recreation Area. Mountain biking is a good, healthy alternative for kids who are disconnected from nature and spending too much time in front of the TV. Patrick described a project in the Waterbury-Stowe area and said that the Lamoille County Economic Development Corporation just approved a \$20,000 grant to build trails on land owned by the Town of Stowe. Patrick also described a 30-mile multi-use trail network that opened in Raystown, PA in 2010. Organizers had estimated that the network would attract 9,800 visitors annually, but there were actually 26,000. On average, day visitors spent \$97 and overnight visitors spent \$227. Patrick described the Kingdom Trails in East Burke, VT, which attract 45,000 mountain bikers per summer. The average income of Kingdom Trail visitors is \$70,000, the average age is 39, and the average distance traveled is 250 miles (from Montreal and Boston). Overall, the Kingdom Trails have a \$4 million impact on the East Burke economy every year, with trails open from May until October. Patrick also described the Whistler Bike Park in British Columbia, which has 125,000 mountain bikers per summer. Patrick said people who use the trails in the town forest are going to learn to appreciate it and want to support it. The town of Hinesburg has received grants from the state for recreational trails in their town forest. Patrick has met with Senators Leahy and Sanders and Representative Welch in Washington DC. Vermont recently passed HR 108 acknowledging VMBA for its contributions to the environment, and Pine Hill Park has also received an award for supporting the environment. At a recent conference on mountain biking, Megan Smith, the VT Commissioner for Tourism, said mountain biking is her #1 priority. Patrick said building beginner trails is important, and direct community support for projects helps with funding.

- 4) The following information was provided in response to questions from those present: West Windsor: West Windsor has 25 miles of trails in the town forest. The Selectboard is currently working out agreements with the ski area and Orange Lake to develop beginner trails on their land. The Selectboard is also working on an agreement between the town and STAB about funding, policing, and maintaining trails in the town forest. The Forest Ecologist hired by the town is going to focus initially on the areas where existing trails are located to identify any sensitive areas where trails may need to be re-routed. There is enough room within the 1300-acre town forest for all types of activity, not just mountain biking. Ascutney State Park: According to Patrick, Ascutney State Park runs below capacity and park officials would like more visitors. Patrick said it's not enough to want more visitors; you have to do something different to attract them. There is a meeting about the future of the park on Thursday at 7:00 PM at the Weathersfield Town Hall. Horse-bike conflict: Bicyclists need to be educated about how to handle themselves around horses. However, mountain bikers prefer single-track trails to dirt roads so much of the potential conflict can be avoided by having a good single-track trail system. Recreational Trails: According to John Taylor from the Upper Valley Trails Alliance, recreational trails have surpassed schools as the #1 amenity that home buyers are looking for. On average, location near a recreational trail adds a \$20,000 premium to a property.
- 5) Adjourn – The meeting concluded and the Selectboard adjourned by consensus at 8:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Harrison