

Minutes January 5, 2018

Attending: Deborah Jurist, Mary Ellen Boyce, David Spencer, Brent Smith, Gary Lamberton, Barbara Johns, Greg Western, Jodi Fleuri-Wohlleb

Called to order at 6:08

Minutes from Dec. 15th accepted with changes. (These have been updated and sent to Dave for posting on the website as accepted)

The letter to the abutters:

Since so much time has passed since the letter was originally written and the committee's work has evolved, we agreed it needs to be rewritten. Barbara will do this and email it to committee members before the next meeting so we can all have input. Hopefully, by the next meeting we will have an up to date letter, that we can put the finishing touches on, if necessary, and finally mail.

Town Warning Report:

There was some discussion about the content of this report, and the value of including the excerpt from the Town Plan regarding the RR Bed.

Some people felt that it is extraneous, and thought the link to the Town Plan would be sufficient. Brent indicated that he thought excluding the actual passage, would not appear transparent to townspeople. Others expressed that the Town Plan is an overlooked document, which is a very important, official document for the town. It has gone through several levels of scrutiny and acceptance, and it would be helpful for townspeople to see the way the RR Bed is incorporated into it.

Finally, a vote was called for, and the report was accepted, with one edit, for inclusion in the Town Warning. (see attached)

Task Review:

Mary Ellen and Barbara had both put time into finding out if our minutes could be published in the JO, Bridge Weekly, or Trendy Times. Mary Ellen reported that the short answer is "No". Barbara discovered that a letter to the editor or an interview could be published by the JO and the Caledonian. Discussion followed regarding how useful that could be to help get the word out, once we have moved along in our process.

Kitty Diggins had worked on the map and Deborah gave Gary a rough draft showing several properties that had not been identified originally. Gary will add those properties and their owners to the list of abutters and try to put their names on the maps themselves. It was noted that Mary Ellen Boyce's property was not included originally for some reason. She will look into that, because it seems as if it should be in the data base.

A questionnaire was discussed that would include public input for the name of the trail, current use and hopefully other things that the members will come up with. We talked about using Survey Monkey as a tool to get the questionnaire out. It was decided that all the members would think about what questions could go on the questionnaire and we would review them at the next meeting.

Dave Spencer, noted that the process for making the RR Bed into a VTRANS trail was included at the end of the draft ordinance as an informational point.

A discussion followed about the value of the VTRANS classification, and the Forest and the Parks Definition of the term “Trail”. This was mostly a recap of the discussion at the Dec. 15th meeting, however, Gary and Deborah had reviewed the question with the Town lawyer and he made it clear that, we had to have an approved ordinance before we could go forward with VTRANS anyway. Greg Western, from Cross Vermont, had a hand out which delineated:

1. Vermont Trails System definition of the term “Trail” and explained the statute from the 1990’s which created the VTS. The Groton RR Bed is part of that system already.
2. The definition of “Trail” by the VTS is vague on purpose so that towns have lots of leeway in defining their trails for themselves.
3. The “Trail and Greenways Council” is an advisory group that was also created by the same statute in the 1990’s. It has a 78 page list of criteria, created in 1995, and recently reconfirmed with VT ANR.
4. The RR Bed (which is included in the Vt Trails System) is eligible for grant money from the Recreation Trails Fund, so long as it is not being used as a road. They have already done work on the RR Bed, after the flood, on the section between Rt 302 and Ricker’s Pond.
5. A benefit of being part of this system is that the state is committed to helping make the trails continuous between state, town and private land.
6. Finally the point was made that the term “trails” has no official definition, but it means “recreation” to everyone.

Greg’s handout also included a lot of useful language and concepts for us to use as we build the ordinance and share our project with the public.
(His handout is attached)

A short discussion about ATV’s and QUADs ensued. It was agreed that we should include QUADs in the Ordinance, as many people have them already, however, they are not allowed on VAST trails. Dave Spencer noted that the town of Groton does not permit the use of ATV’s on our roads and that in the current draft ordinance they are not allowed on the RR Bed. It was noted that addressing the use of ATVs on the RR Bed will be an important part of our work. We are not ready for this yet.

There was a lot of discussion about maps that show the trails in Vermont. It was pointed out by several people that the E911 mapping system shows spots on the RR Bed. It is very useful. There are also ways to look at the RR Bed through the ANR mapping system and Brent is very familiar with that. There is also VCGI geographic information online, but an individual needs a program to open it up.

Brent

Spoke with Paul Keenan, a SB member from Ryegate about their RR Bed and let them know of our project. Mr. Keenan, as a representative of our neighboring town, expressed no concerns about our project. He noted however, that in his opinion, allowing ATVs to use the RR Bed could bring a lot of economic development to the towns of Ryegate and Groton. It was noted that there are places in NH where there seems to be an economic benefit, however, the details of the actual economic benefit to the towns is not known.

A discussion ensued, concerning the spots in Ryegate which were part of the RR Bed and have become privately owned. One glaring example is at the east end of the Creamery Road where an individual took it upon himself to gate the RR Bed off and thereby prohibit the public from using it. Greg pointed out that Ryegate is an example of a town which gave up its ability to preserve the RR Bed. Groton is the only town in Vermont who “saved the bed” in his words!

There was discussion about the way the parking is described in the draft ordinance. Dave explained that he used Google to determine the location and the descriptions of the parking areas, but the committee felt it needed to be described in a more detailed way. Dave will add some language to the Parking section, to include the locations in regards to Brown Drive and Ricker’s Pond. He will also, take a stab at describing the parking spot, that is owned by the town on Little Italy Road, more fully.

There was discussion about speed limits on the RR Bed. Some points that were discussed:

1. Perhaps different speed limits should be made for different parts of the trail
2. Summer and winter speed limits will have to be different and this could be complicated with signage.
3. Signage is already put up for winter speed limits, so it might not be that hard
4. 25 mph might not be a good choice for the RR Bed, as it is actually pretty fast on a single lane track like the RR Bed.

There was a discussion about the format for our meetings going forward.

Procedure:

We talked about how the process will work going forward. It was agreed that unsettled questions would be decided by a majority vote.

A very basic framework was agreed upon:

1. We will continue to begin with a review and approval, of the minutes from the last meeting.
2. Go through the draft ordinance, one item at a time for each meeting. We will assign tasks in regards to the item being discussed at the next meeting
3. We will reserve a 20 minute period at the beginning of each meeting for the public. It will be called: Community Concerns. If a member of the public comes in with an issue, we will listen while they explain it, and then put it on the agenda for the next meeting, in the hopes that we will have time to consider the problem and come up with a useful response. If the matter concerns health and safety we will not put it off however.
4. Task Reports and Ordinance item discussion
5. Gary will try and set up a group email system utilizing grotonvt.com, so we can communicate with each other outside the meetings, without using our regular email(?). It will also insure that all members are included
6. We will not include non members of the committee in our meeting emails
7. Deborah will talk to the SB about the number of members that are on the committee. It is currently capped at 8. Should that be changed?

8. Deborah is adding that we should try and end the meeting with an agenda for the next meeting because we didn't talk about it.
9. The meetings will end at 7:30 pm unless the group decides, together, to stay and finish up an important discussion

Tasks:

Everyone: Come up with items for the questionnaire. Look at ordinances for other towns regarding their trails and recreational areas.

(This was not actually assigned to anyone but, Deborah will do this for sure and would love others doing it also)

Brent: Research speed limits on similar trails

Mary Ellen and Barbara: Rewrite the abutter letter and email to committee before the next meeting

Dave: Update parking area description

Gary: Update map and set up email system if possible

Deborah: Talk to SB about member size and start a questionnaire that we can add to as a group.

Adjourned at 8:00

Agenda for next meeting Jan. 19, 2018

Review and approve minutes

Community Concerns (20 minute limit)

Approve the abutter letter

Trapping: The state does not allow trapping without the written consent of the property owner, therefore we are within our legal rights to prohibit trapping from the RR Bed. (DJ had researched this before the last meeting but we didn't talk about it)

Add to Authority #1 Section 3431 of Title 5, as suggested by the attorney:

(which was printed on the back of the last page of the minutes from our last meeting, but not discussed)

Review tasks

Pick the first item on the ordinance we will work on for the next meeting

Adjourn at 7:30