

Natick, MA - Trails and Forest Stewardship (TaSF) Committee  
Monday January 11, 2021 @ 7:00 pm

The meeting was held via Zoom online conference platform due to the state of emergency surrounding COVID-19 and the requirements to social distance and limit large gatherings. The meeting was recorded.

### **Meeting Minutes**

#### **Committee Members Present:**

Doug Drenik (chair), Lisa Standley (vice chair), Bill Brodnitzki (clerk), Jim Frantzreb, Mike Uccello, Denise Robbi, Sharon Sharpe, David Little (newly appointed member), Dominic Hall (joined at 7:10)

#### **Members Absent:**

**Observers and other participants for all or a portion of the meeting:** Martin Kessel, Marianne Iarossi, Nathan Lord

Doug Drenik called the meeting called at 7:02pm.

Check the TaFS Google drive for agendas, minutes, assessments, etc.

#### 1) Approval of Minutes from December 7, 2020:

A motion to approve the minutes as written was made by Mike Uccello and seconded by Sharon Sharpe, which was approved unanimously (8 - 0)

#### 2) New Member Introduction

David Little is the new member replacing Tariq Abu-Jabar, who has moved from Natick. David's participation was approved by the Conservation Commission (ConComm) in December, 2020. Welcome David!

#### 3) Trail Assessments:

Pegan Cove and Morse Pond trail systems were recently assessed. Doug provided the following summary.

Pegan Cove is in "fairly good" condition after years of active engagement and upkeep; however, there are a few parts of the trail that are wet and could benefit from some re-routing or bog bridges. This trail system directly connects to the new CRT.

At the Morse Pond trail system, near the Department of Public Works (DPW) facility on Oak Street, the Committee recommended rerouting the trailhead, closer to Oak Street, which is where the trailhead used to be. It has access to Morse Pond which has pretty views of the pond; however, a very steep section needs to be rerouted prevent erosion and improve footing. There is an encampment near the water that needs to be removed. The group proposed

making the route a loop by adding a trail within the fence near the DPW to connect the trail and prevent people from going through DPW property. Martin Kessel recommended possibly also using a route near the playground to provide access to Bacon Street. Marianne asked about water access and if it is possible. The general agreement is it would be difficult unless access can be gained near the pumping station, which seems unlikely. Marianne will reach out to the DPW see if they are open to a loop concept. Lisa suggested this be done at a very high level. Jim Frantzreb pointed out no kiosk exists and he also mentioned that many of the trees were significantly damaged and ripped up by the encampment users. A trail days or boy scout project could be used for trail maintenance. The potential for improved trail accessibility was discussed as part of the loop concept, given the gradual slope to the water.

#### 4) Trail Signage Update Sub-Committee Updates:

Lisa Standley provided an update on the committee's activities. Recently the committee has reviewed the materials in the kiosks. Lisa is working on improve the Timothy Coolidge kiosk as an example. They have also thought through priorities for 2021. The suggested first priority is to re-blaze the trails under the new guidelines (colors, standards, etc). Proposed budget is \$360. Another priority is new trail head signs, for about 25 locations. Initial estimate is \$50 per sign, for a total of \$1000. The last priority is to improve the kiosks (trim, plexiglass, paint, add new maps, improve signs). Budget is roughly \$100 per kiosk, so approximately \$1000 for the 10 existing kiosks. The total budget proposed is estimated at \$2500 for all 3 projects. This budget excludes net-new kiosks. The committee will look a variety of suppliers for signage. Once details are established, a proposal to ConComm should be made. The next ConComm meeting is January 21<sup>st</sup> and the committee will aim to present the funding request.

Marianne Iarossi is working with Sunshine Signs on the Interpretive Signs at Pickerel Pond. Estimate is \$2500 total for the 2 signs including installation. Timetable is March or April 2021 for installation.

#### 5) Trail Stewardship Sub-Committee Update:

Doug Drenik and Marianne Iarossi joined "coffee with a purpose" group (15 to 20 people) hosted by Pat Conway. Doug introduced the Trail Stewardship program to the group and he received a lot of good feedback. Based on the feedback Doug is in the process of reworking the program overview. Additionally, Doug is trying to figure out the update mechanism by the trail stewards. Discussion on the best mechanism to track information and notify committee leaders. A discussion on the various merits of the use of facebook, google sheets or google forms, or some combination. Marianne proposed a test of some mechanism to try the process. Marianne will set up a sample form to start and share with Doug.

Reporting problems by the general public is a slightly different issue and also needs to be addressed. Discussion of if dealing with invasive species should be part of the stewardship role, although the TaSF committee deemed it too complex and potentially harmful. Doug agreed to exclude invasive species removal from the Trail Steward duties.

#### 6) Priority Projects for 2021

A discussion of 2021 Priority Projects commenced. Doug recommended Signage (including Maps and Kiosk improvements) and the Stewardship program as likely priorities. Doug then opened it up to others. Jim recommended trail re-routing and rework as possible as identified in the trail assessments. Lisa suggested a focus on the Town Forest (TF) as the property with the most impact to users, and named a number of trail improvements, based on previous assessments, that could be made. The TF presents opportunities for scout days and trail days for projects as well. Domenic suggested adding trail improvements at a second, smaller, property as well. Martin Kessel pointed out the trail days are typically in early May, the weekend after Earth Day, and require a 2-month planning window.

Nate Lord indicated that Pat Conway (Keep Natick Beautiful) will slowly step down and noted it may be an opportunity to unite the different, yet similar, groups. Dominic suggested a priority in 2021 also include being intentional in our efforts to establish this group as an active 'Committee' meaningfully improving the community. It was noted that Friends of Natick Trails (FoNT) is also looking for projects now that fund raising for the CRT is almost complete.

The Committee discussed a pre-approved (advanced permitting) process for projects to minimize delays. Marianne is working on a standing generic permit (with notification) for a "blanket permit" to help streamline approvals and permits for basic trail work and re-routes. An application (Notice of Intent) has been filed and will be discussed by the Conservation Commission on Jan. 21.

Marianne also requested this committee consider ecological improvements as well as trails. Jim mentioned Garden in the Woods and Broadmoor as potential areas to learn from and explore. Lisa wrote the ecological assessment for Broadmoor and can share at the appropriate time. If the TaFS Committee has other thoughts, please share with Doug.

#### 7) Other Business

Jim Frantreb offered a gift certificate to Garden in the Woods to a Committee member. Please contact Jim if interested.

Marianne Iarossi provided an update on the TF. A recent DCR grant provided funding for boundary blazing, which is underway, to signal where the property lines are. The grant also funded a 2-year program of the Invasive species removal that will start in the Spring. Additional money was requested for seed mix for the 'meadow', although it may be more complex than just spreading. Marianne asked the TaSF for some guidance on how to best proceed. Dominic suggested that the committee could provide some of the labor to facilitate the seed spread. Marianne agreed, noting that the DCR grant requires a labor match.

Marianne stated that the Framingham State Students did a "user assessment" that looked at other communities' communication efforts and she will share that effort. The assessment will be used to guide marketing.

Marianne indicated that an interactive trail map is being developed and will share with the Committee shortly for feedback and potential content to help the map be more useful and interactive (ex. accessibility, difficulty, etc.)

## 8) Take Aways

Priorities and most take aways are captured in sections 6 and 7. Key take aways are as follows:

- Marianne – contact DPW regarding removing the encampment and downed trees, and a potential loop at Morse Pond
- Lisa – Trail Signage subcommittee to present proposed budget to the ConComm committee on January 21<sup>st</sup>
- Doug – Share the Stewardship program description with the TaSF committee
- Marianne – Develop a potential reporting form for the Stewardship program
- Doug and Lisa assemble the preliminary list of 2021 priorities based on TaSF committee input.
- Marianne will share the Framingham State student user assessments.
- Marianne will share the interactive map with the committee for feedback and content.

A motion to adjourn was made by Lisa Standley and seconded by Denise Robbi which was approved unanimously at approximately 9:04pm (9 - 0)