

Natick, MA - Trails and Forest Stewardship (TaFS) Committee
Monday February 1, 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, Dominic Hall, Sharon Sharpe arrived at 7:40

Members Absent: David Little

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

Doug Drenik called the meeting to order at 7:04pm.

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

1) Approval of Minutes from January 11, 2021:

A motion to approve the minutes as written was made by Lisa Standley and seconded by Jim Frantzreb, which was approved unanimously (6 - 0)

2) Trail Assessments

No new assessments were conducted since last meeting.

3) Conservation Committee (Con Com) Meeting Update

Doug and Lisa went to the last Con Com meeting to provide an update on the TaFS committee progress.

Doug reviewed the 'generic approval' permit process which should allow general maintenance on trails on Conservation Commission-managed lands. We are waiting for a State DEP file number. The file number is pending and it can not be approved by Con Com until the DEP number is received. Martin asked a clarifying question regarding land that is mixed ownership and if the wetlands commission needed to be included. Marianne explained it depends on the work and location. Most situations will have a form filled out and filed, however it won't likely require unique approval. Dominic asked about generic approvals from other property managers. Lisa explained the plan is to approach other property owners with the signage plan and other suggested enhancements and request approval in that interaction.

Doug provided Con Com an update on TaFS priorities and the signage plan and budget. The Con Com approved \$3000 for signage, trail marking and kiosk improvements. There is no

deadline for spending the budget. Marianne suggested minimizing the number of people spending money to simplify the reimbursement process.

Doug briefed the Con Com on other TaFS efforts as well including the stewardship program, town forest priorities and the eagle scout projects. He plans to provide quarterly updates.

4) Signage Subcommittee Update

Lisa provided a signage update. Lisa recently replaced the materials in the Timothy Coolidge kiosk. This is starting the process to standardized kiosk materials. The TaFS committee discussed potentially including some messaging in the kiosk about the trails and land being maintained by volunteers, something like ‘this trail is largely maintained by your volunteer neighbors, please help’. Jim noted that kiosk repairs will require some carpentry skills. Given David Little’s skills he may be able to help. Some future projects may require DPW help and we will ask, although the timeline will likely be slow. Doug believes that the Stewards program may help expand our capabilities, by adding different skilled members. Marianne mentioned that there is a section of the town website for the TaFS Committee if the committee wants to utilize it. A discussion on the web location of latest ‘trail maps’ occurred. A full set of updated maps is on the Trails webpage, but the Open Space Plan page also has an incomplete and out-date set. Marianne will work with IT to ensure that there is a single site with all current maps. Martin urged that the Pegan Hill map be removed, as it is outdated, and replaced with a link to the Trustee’s website.

5) Trail Stewardship Update

The Stewardship Form and Sheet are now working. Marianne clarified that the Sheet is to record the activities of the stewards, and the Form to report issues that the steward is unable to address. Some data standards need to be established to a) help better collect data to support programs, b) potentially justify budget and c) to help ensure stewards are doing their work. The committee suggested some minor modifications (such as drop downs), to help standardize the data collection. Discussion of number of stewards occurred, It was decided to initially not limit the number of stewards, and to try and ensure that there is coverage for all trails. Domenic suggested collecting wildlife and botanical data as a “citizen science” project. We may want to track parking lot related and other non-sanctioned issues as well. Marianne asked that any observations of parking lot problems be reported using the Stewardship Form.

6) Town Forest Meadow Project

Lisa and Jim prepared a comprehensive assessment, management and implementation plan on the town forest meadow restoration project including a budget. The recommendation is to start on a smaller scale in approximately half of the 1.1-acre meadow Jim has agreed to take the lead. He reviewed the timetable and specifics of the plan. The extraction of the wood chips is a concern based on size of project and potential difficulty. A discussion about alternative means of removal was discussed or potentially using the chips on trail. Most alternatives have significant obstacles. One Eagle Scout may be interested in helping with this project. Jim suggested speaking to DPW about what their approach might be, as well as requesting assistance. According to Nate Lord, there may be a high school group that could also be

utilized. Jim mentioned the need for specific tools for chip removal. Nate mentioned that Pat Conway could potentially lend them. Discussion on using heavy equipment to help with the first pass was discussed. The size of the project was discussed as potentially too big, and we may need to break it down into smaller plots. An alternative was potentially getting an estimated cost from a 3rd party ecological landscape/restoration firm. Signage and public education will also be part of the process. The recommendation is to remove the firepit, although it is anticipated it will return.

7) Eagle Scout Projects

Doug mentioned 3 eagle scout projects pending. One project will support the meadow project, the second project will beautify the Middlesex Path near the Dog park, including the kiosk (which will need to be coordinated with the signage subcommittee) The third project is to rehabilitate the Mary Ann Morse Path, in Coolidge Woods. This trail may need to be re-routed around the wetlands area and require a permit for a new bridge. Doug noted that these projects are currently awaiting Scout Council approval, after which the scouts will submit detailed plans for Con Com and TaFS review.

8) Clerk Change/Assignment

Bill's term as Clerk is up in March, the committee needs a replacement. If anyone would like to volunteer, please let Doug know.

9) Other Business

David Little removed the deer stand along the new Pickerel Pond trail.

The proposed retail marijuana stores along Route 9 may be donating money to the Friends of Natick Trails.

10) Take Aways

- 1) Marianne will update the Stewardship and Forms and Tracking Sheet documents.
- 2) Doug will include the map on the Trail Steward overview so people can identify a trail near them.
- 3) Subcommittees will continue to pursue activities.
- 4) Lisa mentioned that the Trails day is scheduled for April and planning will need to start in March. According to Doug, David Little will likely be the organizer.

A motion to adjourn was made by Lisa Standley and seconded by Sharon Sharpe which as approved unanimously at approximately 9:08 pm (8 - 0)