

Minutes of the Norwich Trails Committee for June 5, 2019

Present: George Clark, Jim Faughnan, Bob Fiskens, Steve Flanders, Eric Friets, Peter Griggs, David Hubbard, Nick Krembs, Betsy Maislen, John McCormick, Lelia Mellen, Peter Milliken, Sean Ogle, Gerry Plummer, Liz Russell, Steve Thoms

Steve Thoms from the Planning Commission led a discussion seeking input about trails for the new Town Plan now being prepared. The work of the Trails Committee has been primarily with trails used seasonally for recreation and for access to natural resources and not with pathways principally intended for transportation or commuting. Easements would in some cases prohibit use of existing trails as transportation routes. Steve Flanders has prepared a draft document providing proposals for the new Town Plan, and this six page document can be seen by scrolling through <http://norwich.vt.us/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Trails-Committee-Agenda-06-05-19.pdf>

Discussion of prospective content related to trails in the new Town Plan is to be on the agenda for the July meeting. The committee expressed appreciation to Steve Thoms for his presentation.

Lelia Mellen of the National Park Service reviewed the status of the soon forthcoming map and brochure about the Appalachian Trail to be provided to visitors in Norwich and Hanover. Attendees at the meeting offered a few suggestions for changes in details of the displayed draft map and brochure. The committee expressed appreciation to Lelia Mellen and Betsy Maislen for keeping the committee informed about the status of this project.

The committee together with the Upper Valley Mountain Biking Association has submitted a proposal to the Forest Service for four trails to cross the Appalachian Trail Corridor. This 19 page proposal can be seen by scrolling through

<http://norwich.vt.us/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Trails-Committee-Agenda-06-05-19.pdf>

It is anticipated that the next step will be a site visit to view the trails discussed in the proposal. It has been proposed that public meetings be held both before and after the site visit, on the same day, so as to provide an opportunity for public input and discussion.

A viewpoint counter to that proposal was presented at the meeting and was reported to be being drafted for submission to the Forest Service. The Appalachian Trail was founded as a foot path to provide hikers with as much of a wilderness experience as possible. It is then suggested that allowing bike trails to cross the corridor will create a precedent for other additional uses which will lead to further disruption of the foot path experience, e.g., by motorized bikes. The corridor is thus viewed as a buffer protecting the foot trail experience and therefore should remain free of disturbance. In the ensuing discussion, it was pointed out that there has been considerable public enthusiasm for provision of bike trails crossing the corridor.

Partly because of holding two work sessions in May, the committee cleared or otherwise improved trails in numerous locations during that month including the Blue Ribbon, Connector, Gile Mountain, Rosemary Rieser, Ballard, Hazen, and Nature Area Trails.

David Hubbard pointed out a need for new trail signage at the pullout on Beaver Meadow Road where the Blue Ribbon and Ballard Trails connect.

The Trails Committee is to hold a work session on Sunday June 16 with the intent of working on the Ballard Park. Participants should meet at 8 AM in the parking lot for the former town pool off Beaver Meadow Road and bring work gloves, drinking water, and insect repellent.

On May 8, engineer Chris Temple inspected the site where a collapsed bridge formerly carried Brown School House Road across Charles Brown Brook. Design costs for a reconfigured foundation area and a new bridge would be about \$9500. The bridge itself would cost considerably more. Possible sources of funding were discussed and included a prospective grant application. Converting the Class IV road into a trail might facilitate achieving the needed funding. Approval for such conversion would be needed from the Land Management Council, Prudential Committee, and Selectboard. Consultation with town, Fire District, and Upper Valley Trails Alliance officials is planned.

Recent discussions with neighbors near the trailhead for the Gile Mountain Trail have indicated support for a modest expansion of the parking lot. New town signs soon to be placed in that area will facilitate enforcement of existing regulations.

At the Conservation Commission meeting on May 21, there was agreement with representatives of this committee on a protocol for approval of any proposed new trails in town.

Respectfully submitted,
George Clark