

Public Meeting
Draft Minutes
February 5, 2015

Present: Glenn Seward, Bruce Boedtke, Tom Kenyon, Kate Wanner (Trust for Public Land), John Roe (Upper Valley Land Trust), Jim Bertrand, Deb Shearer, Jim Lyall, Elvin Kaplan, Win Johnson, Alice Anderson, Mark Roden, Jeff Dugas, Jim Yates, Laurie & Bob Norris, Heather Hoyns, Shirley Ouelette, Rudy Gross, Barbara Gerstner, Cathy Boedtke, Barbara Truex, Shannon Harrington, Charty McNabb, Tyler Cohen, Ted Siegler, Erik Schutz, Claudia Sacuk, Kate Wanner, Aaron Gonthier (Windsor on Air), George Calver (VT Standard)

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the uses that will be allowed in the expanded town forest once it is subject to a conservation easement and a revised management plan. Kate Wanner from the Trust for Public Land (TPL) said TPL now has a signed option agreement with MFW Associates to acquire the 469-acre former ski area and hopes to close on the purchase in August. Kate talked about the funding sources for the project and said that the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB), one of the funding sources, and the Upper Valley Land Trust (UVLT) would hold the conservation easement on the property. Kate said the acquisition includes the 10-acre parking lot across from the ski area but does not include the base lodge or the two acres around the base lodge. Kate talked about the biodiversity and rare natural communities on Mt. Ascutney and showed a slide of the existing and proposed trail system. Glenn said it will probably be a year or two before trail easements in the Mile Long Field area are finalized. Kate noted that the property to be acquired includes the source water protection area for the water system that serves most of the residences on the mountain. John Roe (UVLT) talked about the easement, which will reflect the property's forest values and non-commercial recreation values. John said the purpose section of the easement should convey a clear vision. John said the easement will have "special management areas" such as vernal pools, surface water buffers, etc. John said the hang-gliding area and the lower ski trails will also have special management considerations. John said some of the upper ski trails will be allowed to regrow to protect the forest values of the property. John said the easement would not provide for re-establishing lifts that serve the upper trails. The funding sources will not allow a commercial ski operation, although back country and glade skiing would be allowed on the upper slopes. Kate said to get funding from the federal Community Forest Program, the property has to be 75% forested. Jim Lyall has mapped out the upper slopes that can be allowed to regrow without much impact. John said recreational use, other than dispersed pedestrian use, will have to be managed by a non-commercial entity. John added that, because federal and state funds are being used, fees can only cover expenses and cannot discriminate based on residency. Elvin asked if local people can be charged an annual usage fee, rather than a day-use fee. John said he will look into that. Win suggested reinstating the school ski program. John said that may be allowable. John said a "comfortable carrying capacity" will have to be established to prevent overuse of the trails. John said timber harvesting will have to be governed by a management plan. There was a question about harvesting firewood. John said firewood can be harvested in accordance with a plan. Heather asked how dense the trees have to be in order to be considered a forest. Kate said she is looking into the federal definition of forests. John talked about prohibited uses, which would include commercial use, permanent structures, subdivision, sale, clear-cutting, mining, roads (except for timber roads), and the introduction of non-native species. Win asked about patch cutting for wildlife habitat. John said that would be defined in the plan. Ted said he has never

been able to prevent non-native species. John said non-natives cannot be intentionally introduced or planted. John said hang-gliding and the associated trails and structures would be allowed. John said dispersed pedestrian uses, including hunting, fishing, trapping and wildlife observation, would be allowed by right, subject to temporary closure for timber harvesting, overuse, or a large event. Timber harvesting will be allowed subject to a forest management plan, except in ecologically sensitive areas. John said the plan will have to address the control of invasive species. John said he envisions three different types of users and intensities of use: off-trail, on-trail, and open trail (i.e. the former lower ski slopes in the intensive use area). Ted asked about trimming to facilitate glade skiing. John said new growth needs to be protected as bird habitat and to allow the forest to regenerate. Ted said without any trimming the upper slopes will become un-skiable. Ted said he thinks there has to be language in the easement that allows some minimal trimming to enable back-country skiing. Jim said it's not necessary to eliminate all the undergrowth, just enough to ski from one patch to another. John said the trails will be defined as the existing approved Act 250 trails and the open alpine trails. New trails would have to be approved by Act 250 and UVLT under the following standards: closed canopy, no erosion to surface waters, minimal erosion overall, and below 1500' in elevation. Horse trails would be those currently open to horses as well as a link between Mile Long Field and the intensive use area. Ted asked if VHCB would also have to approve new trails. John said VHCB generally delegates those details to UVLT. There was a question about overnight camping. John said the current forest management plan prohibits it. Jim said discussions with the horse community have indicated that most of the use would be event-driven. Jim said he is looking at a contingency plan for a double track trail that would get riders from the intensive use area to other horse areas in town. Ted said easements typically include language that allows you to move trails within a certain distance of their existing location to address erosion issues, for example. John said if the language is too loose, there may be misunderstandings. John said he envisions the glade skiing areas being part of the forest and moving over time to allow for forest regeneration. John said there's a sugarbush in a couple of areas that could be leased for ten years at a time. Grazing in the open intensive use area may be allowed but there are fencing and water issues that would have to be addressed. John said downhill sports (skiing, biking, snowboarding, etc.) and animal-powered sports (e.g. horseback riding) would be allowed in the intensive use area, along with temporary structures such as jumps and warming shelters. Outside the intensive use area, signs, bridges, the hang-gliding platform, and the existing parking lot and water system infrastructure would be allowed. Ted asked about snowmaking infrastructure. John said that would be a first but may be possible. Ted asked about night skiing. John said, personally, he would not be concerned about night skiing in the intensive use area. There was discussion about the number of lifts that could be allowed in the intensive use area. There was a question about building a lodge. John said a lodge could not be built on the land covered by the easement but there are other options. Jim said the old base lodge is on a piece of land that the town is acquiring that is not covered by the easement. John said he can envision a short rope-tow for sledding and a longer rope-tow to get to mid-station but, beyond that, it starts to feel like a commercial ski area. John said the idea is to create a new vision and not to recreate the same enterprise that has gone bankrupt several times. Claudia was concerned about limiting the number of lifts. In order to access all of the lower ski slopes, Glenn said there would need to be a surface lift to just above mid-station. There was discussion about the pros and cons of an aerial lift v. a surface lift. Glenn said the existing foundations may not be in good enough shape to put a new lift on. Heather said she would like to see additional horse trails. John said this region of the state has more horse trails than any other. Heather said most of the horse trails in the area are on private land or town roads and it would be nice to have some trails on public land. Shirley and Heather

both noted that private landowners can close the trails on their property at any time. Erik said, with education, riders and bikers can safely share multi-use trails. There was discussion about the amount of erosion caused by horses v. the amount caused by bicycles. Erik said all users cause erosion but if the trails are properly built and maintained, it's not an issue. John said he envisions events using the trails and the intensive use area but not the back-country. John said there will be language addressing carrying capacity. Camping could be allowed in the intensive use area, subject to appropriate management. There was a suggestion to make allowance for small (20 to 40 people) back-country events. John said the easement will have language that ties it into a 10-year forest management plan and a 5-year recreation management plan. Kate said a draft management plan has to be included with the federal grant application next week but it will not be finalized for a couple more months, after being posted on the town website so people can comment on it. Kate said Forest Ecologist Tii McLane has expanded the existing forest management plan to include the new acreage. Kate said the existing management plan is implemented by the Town Forest Committee with oversight by the Selectboard. Ted said the town is ultimately responsible for abiding by the easement but the Selectboard can assign management responsibility to another entity (e.g. one of the committees or a non-profit organization). John said the easement has to be in place by the time the property is conveyed and the intention is not to amend it. Management plans, on the other hand, may be revised every five to ten years. Rudy said some of the resort-area property owners would like to be able to attend one of these meetings on a weekend. Glenn said he would be happy to set that up. Glenn said the success of this venture will depend on the support of the property owners. A request was made to put tonight's video recording on the town's website. The meeting adjourned at 8:37 PM. Additional comments may be submitted to Martha Harrison at town.of.west.windsor@valley.net

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Harrison