Ad Hoc Ellington Trails Committee
Special Meeting Minutes
August 10, 2022
Nicholas J. DiCorleto, Jr. Meeting Hall

MEMBERS PRESENT: Valerie Amsel, Linda Anderson, Pam McCormick, Ann McLaughlin, Cynthia van Zelm, Deanna Wambolt-Gulick

MEMBERS ABSENT: Larrissa Burke, Judi Manfre

OTHERS PRESENT: Bruce Dinnie, Tom Palshaw

I. Call to Order: Ms. Anderson called the meeting to order at 6:35 pm.

II. Citizens’ Forum: Mr. Palshaw brought up some graffiti on the athletic field sign; this will be addressed by Public Works.

III. Approval of Minutes
   A. July 6, 2022

Ms. Anderson discussed an edit concerning the Trail of Treats; the banner will be left out to limit the size of the crowd, not to change the flow of traffic. Officers will be present until 8:30, not 8:40 pm. Public Works mowed a large strip at Batz; herbicide that kills mugwort was put down along the guardrails. Ms. van Zelm stated that her name had been miscapitalized in the minutes.

MOVED (VAN ZELM), SECONDED (WAMBOLT-GULICK) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE JULY 6, 2022 REGULAR MEETING AS AMENDED.

IV. Old Business
   A. Hockanum River Association Report

There was nothing new to report. They are still working on mowing maintenance; four machines are out mowing. Ms. Anderson shared that she sent out a thank you to the Boy Scout who completed the benches.

   B. New Maps Update

Ms. Anderson shared that Mr. Radziwon will not be able to finish the maps until the winter, which will allow them to finish up Crystal Ridge and Ellington Highlands.

   C. Crystal Ridge Update

Ms. Anderson shared that the Eagle Scout is planning to go forward with work on the Crystal Ridge Trail, and he has an active fundraiser going to help with the project. If he is unable to complete the project for any reason, the Scout Troop is planning to step in and get it finished as planned.

   D. Ellington Highlands Update

      1. Disc Golf
Ms. Anderson shared that she walked the trail with Dustin and laid out what the Committee would like, designating what portion of the space would be for trails and what portion would be for disc golf. The designer of the course would set it up so that discs would be thrown away from the neighborhood houses. They are also considering putting in a barrier.

Ms. McCormick clarified what portion of the space they are looking at. Ms. Anderson shared that it is before going over the first small bridge, down a path of the left. It would be marked with a sign and all the rules/regulations of the course. The trail would be off to the right. There is a tree in the space of the potential disc golf space, and it would be about ¼ of the space of the field. That would be as close as the course goes to the houses.

Ms. McCormick expressed her concern that there isn’t an easy access route there, just the emergency access between two neighboring houses. Ms. McCormick shared that the neighborhood is already concerned about the treatment they receive from people going into that space, and there are concerns about purposefully throwing things at the houses.

Ms. Amsel further clarified where the intended space is and asked who would pay for the course, which is the Recreation Department. Ms. Anderson confirmed that the Committee is not responsible for the maintenance of the course, and not responsible for any injuries. The Town needs to recognize that there are liabilities associated with participating in disc golf. Ms. Anderson shared that she found instances online where people faced serious injuries as a result of disc golf, specifically on courses that were in shared spaces.

The disc golf course will now be moving forward through the design and approval processes with the Town. Ms. Anderson shared that members of the community have expressed concern about the course. The fact that there are concerned citizens has been shared with the Planning and Zoning Commission. The Committee feels it is important to identify and bring up any possible concerns with the development of the course.

Ms. McCormick shared that there are plenty of other courses in the area.

Ms. Anderson shared her concern around erosion, based on the usage of the land. This would be a concern for the actual trail, but there are off-trail erosion concerns based on misthrown discs. She expressed concerns over injuries - to other people using the trails, to the trees, or to people that might climb a tree to obtain misthrown discs.

Ms. McLaughlin asked if neighboring towns have spaces dedicated to just disc golf, or if they have trails going through them. Ms. Amsel shares that the disc golf courses she is familiar with have the disc golf areas well separated from trails.

Ms. McLaughlin asked about what disc golf players like in a course. Ms. Anderson shared that they don’t like just open fields. Ms. McLaughlin asked if they’ll need to cut down trees. Ms. Anderson says no, but they will need to cut down brush. Ms. McLaughlin expressed concern over the impact this would have on wildlife. Mr. Dinnie shared that when the course was developed in Wickham Park, players specifically did not want to be anywhere near hikers. Ms. Anderson echoed that she has heard this from other people who play.

Ms. Amsel asks if the Committee can present an alternative to the Town, where the course would not intersect with trails. Ms. Anderson said that Dustin is open to other parcels if this does get approved. Ms. van Zeilm echoed that it really might be better to find a different space that would not need as much consideration in terms of limiting the impact of the course, such as the barrier and direction of the throwing for different holes.

Mr. Palshaw shared that there are many other properties out there that could be considered for this, such as a property on Abbott, which would not be suitable for trails. He suggested that the Committee look into different properties available; Ms. Amsel agreed. Ms. Anderson reminded the Committee that any
property would also need to have parking available, and that some land parcels have usage restrictions. Ms. Anderson will identify different already-owned parcels that could be used for this purpose.

Ms. van Zelm asked if there is an appetite for the course in Town, and Ms. Anderson affirmed that there is interest in creating a disc golf course.

The Committee reaffirmed its concern about the development of a disc golf course, due to the liability issues and impact to wildlife and trails.

E. Conservation Commission Report – Val Amsel

2022 Sustainable CT, which Ellington is exploring, was discussed. There are some items that would impact the Committee, such as pollinator pathways. Ms. Amsel shared the definition of what a pollinator pathway is, and clarified that the goal is to get as many organizations involved in Town as possible. This is something that Shared Services will be looking at. Ms. Amsel says that the Committee would want to look at what pollinator paths are already in existence. Batz and Windermere Trails would lend themselves to pollinator paths already.

Ms. van Zelm clarified who is spearheading this initiative. Ms. Amsel says that it is the Town that is seeking certification in this program. Ms. van Zelm asked who is looking to gather the information; Ms. Amsel said that it is Lisa Houlihan, Town Planner. Ms. van Zelm is willing to take on the task of passing along the information as to what the Committee can do to help.

Ms. Amsel shared that the Committee can look up pollinator towns, which Ellington is not currently. Ms. van Zelm expressed that it is a lot of work, and Ms. McLaughlin volunteered to help, stating that she would like to get involved with this project as she is available.

Ms. Anderson summed up that the Committee will get in touch with Lisa, and see what the next step is and how the Committee can help. She reiterated that Windermere would be a great trail to develop to this end, but points out that this would involve fighting the invasives in the trails, which would be challenging because there aren’t enough volunteers to tackle that with ease. Ms. Anderson said that this could be a good Eagle Scout/Scout project as well.

F. Trail of Treats Update

Ms. Anderson shared that the project is moving along, and she asked members of the Committee about helping to contact different businesses. The applications will be going out soon.

Ms. Anderson drew attention to the map, sharing that many agree it would be beneficial to have a path which separates the entrance and the exit. It would just involve temporarily modifying the fencing. This plan would also make it so that the entrance is near fire department lights, making the entrance well lit. Mr. Stavens also volunteered to provide any light needed for the project. Rachel is providing stakes for this at wholesale price for the trail. Hopefully CERT members will be able to help with traffic. Due to scheduling needs, the markers for the vendor spaces will be set up on Friday afternoon. Troop 96 is confident they’ll be able to get people to help stake the parking lot, which only leaves marking the path and doing the luminaries for Monday.

Ms. Anderson suggested that perhaps the Scouts would be able to help with additional eyes and ears along the path, helping anyone that might need it. She is hopeful that perhaps they can help with the collection of food as well.

Ms. Amsel asked when the Committee would need help for this event. Ms. Anderson said that set up help is needed on Monday morning, setting up the zigzag lines and the luminaries, and also needed on Monday, at 3:00 pm, when the vendors start setting up.

G. Mowing at Batz
Ms. Anderson spoke to Ken Radziwon, Director of Public Works, about setting up a mowing plan, and asked if mowing could be done towards the end of November. Mr. Radziwon said that wouldn't be possible because the mowers will be put away by then, so the mowing may need to be done earlier.

V. New Business

A. Metcalf - Tree Removal

Thanks to the work on First Selectman Spielman and State Representative Foster, $55,000 has been secured from the State to address the dead trees on the Metcalf Trails; there is some wiggle room with the funds to address signage needs, as well. Ms. Anderson suggested that the members think about areas where signage may be needed, including existing trails as well as those in development.

B. Kimball/Hopkins Road

Ms. McCormick and Mr. Palshaw brought this item to Ms. Anderson's attention; they will be changing the entrance and exit for Hopkins Road. The curved dirt road will be avoided, and instead the exit will be at Pinnacle, hopefully placing a light. The plans are finalized but should be out soon. This could affect the Kimball Peach Trail and the Shenipsit Trail. Ms. Amsel expressed concern over the bridges that are currently there; Ms. Anderson assured the Committee that it is unlikely that this plan would affect that aspect of the trail.

Ms. Anderson plans to advocate for a parking space for the Kimball and Shenipsit Trails.

VI. Subcommittee Reports

A. Treasurer

Ms. Anderson said that this will likely be Ms. McLaughlin's last report, as she intends to step down as Treasurer. Ms. McLaughlin shared a copy of her latest report, and said that the expectation, based on new budgeting practices, is that the Committee is expected to raise $500. Ms. Anderson disagreed, stating that she spoke to the Town about this, and that it will be adjusted once the Committee completes a form in January. Ms. McLaughlin shared and explained her documentation to Ms. Anderson.

Ms. McLaughlin also shared that it would be a good idea next year to ask for an increase in the Committee's budget, given the expansion of programming and addition of new trails; she feels it would be a good idea to keep track of how many hours the Committee spends working on projects.

B. Planning & Development

There was no further discussion.

C. Maintenance

1. Kimball
2. Metcalf
3. Windermere
4. Batz

Ms. Anderson shared that she and Ms. Manfre put up signage at Kimball, Metcalf, Windermere and Batz. They also removed graffiti with a cleaner that should help deter future graffiti. Some brush was cut at Kimball; poison ivy at that location needs to be addressed. There is also a branch that currently hides the sign there.

D. Community Outreach

1. Astronomy

Ms. Anderson shared that this event was a success and that people really enjoyed it; she is planning to have two of these events next year. It would be interested to try to plan an event around a meteor shower, though the timing would be a potential challenge.
2. 3 Foragers Talk at Hall Memorial Library
This event is being held on Tuesday, August 16 at 6:30 and is co-sponsored with Hall Memorial Library. Mushrooms were expected to be brought, but Ms. Anderson shared that that may be a challenge due to the current lack of rainfall.

3. Fall Festival
The Fall Festival is being planned for Saturday, October 15, with a raindate of the 22nd. The Committee should decide if they’d like to participate and provide an activity; this decision will be made by the next meeting.

VII. Adjournment
MOVED (VAN ZELM), SECONDED (MCCORMICK) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADJOURN THE TRAILS COMMITTEE MEETING AT 8:10 PM.

Prepared by Deanna Wambolt-Gulick; submitted by Julia Connor