



TOWN OF ELLINGTON

Ad Hoc Ellington Trails Committee

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BILL SCHULTZ
TOM PALSHAW
DAN CHAMBERLIN
ROBERT BARONE
ANN HARFORD

Ad Hoc Ellington Trails Committee
Regular Meeting Minutes
March 6, 2024
Town Hall Annex

MEMBERS PRESENT: Linda Anderson, Tom Palshaw, Dan Chamberlin, Robert Barone, Cynthia van Zelm, Valerie Amsel, Lindsay Neubecker, Donna Allen, Deanna Wambolt-Gulick

MEMBERS ABSENT: Judi Manfre, Bill Shultz, Ann Harford, Larrissa Burke

I. Call to Order

Ms. Anderson called the meeting to order at 6:32 pm.

II. Citizens' Forum: Mr. Palshaw shared a concern regarding parking at Stein Road. He is looking to have utility task vehicle (UTV) access put in to ensure that emergency service vehicles can more easily access deeper parts of the trail.

III. Approval of Minutes

A. February 7, 2024

MOVED (PALSHAW), SECONDED (BARONE) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 7, 2024 MEETING.

IV. Old Business

A. Hockanum River Crew Report

Mr. Barone shared that things are muddy, but the trail is getting use, and he noted that some brush will need to be trimmed as the spring season starts. He also shared that there is ATV activity on the trail, though there has been some attempt to curb the access that these vehicles have.

B. Boardwalk – Wetlands

Ms. Anderson shared that she, Mr. Palshaw and Ms. Amsel went before the Inland Wetlands Agency (IWA) and received initial approval, though the Committee has been asked by the IWA to use metal fence spikes instead of pressure-treated wood posts. Upon further research, it appears that guidance from the National Wetlands Inventory recommends pressure-treated wood; the Committee will bring this back to the IWA at the next meeting and anticipates final approval.

C. Conservation Commission Report

Ms. Amsel noted that there was no meeting this past month. However, Ms. Anderson shared that there is a parcel of land near Hopkins and Route 140 that is currently for sale; the parcel is largely wetlands, and it is near some trails, which may provide easier access. There is also a parcel of land for sale in Tolland, on Grahaber, that the Conservation Commission wanted the Committee to be aware of as well.

D. Grants for Kiosks

Ms. Anderson shared that the purchase order for the kiosks has gone through and has moved into production.

E. New Emergency Signs

Mr. Palshaw shared some examples of signage in other towns and expressed concern about how to best orient the signs. There is ongoing conversation about how to include the necessary town code, trail code, and reflectivity.

Mr. Barone expressed that the more concise the sign information can be kept, the better, requiring less to remember or ask in an emergency.

Mr. Palshaw reminded the Committee that emergency services have different maps than the public. Ms. Anderson read the guidelines for the kiosk and map, which reminds users of the trails of the emergency trail markers, including what information should be conveyed in the case of an emergency.

1. Emergency Meeting Update

There was no further discussion on this item.

F. Crystal Ridge Map

Ms. Anderson shared suggestions for the map, including highlighting the emergency signage information, located at the bottom of the map, in yellow to draw attention, as well as increasing the font size.

Concern was expressed about the size and colors of the trails. Ms. Amsel asked if the lines/fonts could be made larger. Ms. Anderson stated that as the trail is actually quite large, this would be challenging.

Ms. Anderson expressed concern over the Quartz Trail, which is challenging to see. There is part of the trail that crosses into private property, which is an issue. The Committee is looking to block off the part of the dirt road that enters private property. Ms. Anderson stated that she doesn't feel that people should be accessing from the bottom of the trail, anyway; the entrance from Old Sandy Beach Road is better.

Ms. Anderson recommended moving the "i" at the entrance over to the "l" in "Crystal Ridge" on the map, to space it away from the private property; she also stated that the part of the dirt road going up the hill should be marked Orange Blaze. The dirt road going down can be marked as dirt road; if it become a trail later, some blazing can be added and the maps updated accordingly.

The "i" at the entrance will move over, closer to the "B" in "Old Sandy Beach Road", so that the kiosk is closer to the start of the trail. The entrance of the trail should tie in to the Quartz Trail instead of being separate. At C2, the "Unmarked Trail" should be eliminated, as there is a boundary marker there and people shouldn't be moving past it.

Ms. Anderson does not anticipate doing a trail guide description yet, though she is planning to mark more accurate mileage information. Once that occurs, the Committee can begin working on the actual description. She asked the Committee members what other activities can be added to the "Suggested Trail Activities" area; Ms. Allen suggested snowshoeing, but Ms. Amsel pointed out how steep the trail is.

Ms. Anderson will update the trail map and share the new draft with the Committee, sharing her anticipation that a few more drafts will be needed before the map is finalized.

G. Road Signs

Ms. Anderson spoke with Public Works, who agreed that the green signs would be too confusing with the existing road signs; it was suggested that these be the same color as agricultural signs, which are brown and white. One set of signs will be done first, to see the cost, but eventually there should be signs for all of the trails.

This would mean one on either side at Kimball, one at Metcalf, one for Windermere, etc. To see what the expense will be, the Crystal Ridge Trail sign will be done first.

Mr. Barone suggested adding the hiking symbol to the road signs as well.

H. Easements for West Road

There were no new updates at this time.

I. Mowing Meeting Results – Batz/Ellington Highlands

1. Mowing

Ms. Anderson met with all interested parties to create a revised mowing plan. Mr. Palshaw asked if the information was sourced from anywhere, and Ms. Anderson stated that she got the information from current recommendations.

Field 1 at Batz, which has invasive plant concerns, will be mowed after the first frost, yearly. Field 2 at Batz will be tilled and planted with wildflower seeds. Mr. Modzelewski will then mow a path down the center for people to walk and admire the flowers and pollinators. Field 3 will be mowed to a low pasture, and a bluebird trail will begin there. The last field will be mowed often throughout the season. Public Works will mow as close as possible between the benches at the amphitheater, and Mr. Palshaw recommended a DR string trimmer to get in closer to the benches before events. The amphitheater field will be mowed more often to ensure that it is clear for event usage. The other parts of the amphitheater field will be mowed after October to help protect the ground nesting birds, and it will be mowed on a yearly basis to keep the Autumn Olive at bay.

The top field at Ellington Highlands will be mowed once a year in October, and some bluebird houses will be put there. The Scouts have given the Committee 11 bluebird houses, and the Committee has another to contribute as well. Ms. Anderson does not want the field mowed more than once a year to ensure that it is welcoming to bluebirds. The second field needs to be mowed down and maintained to keep it from getting covered in brush. At some point, the view near where the picnic tables are going will need to be opened up. The third field has recently been brush hogged, but it has overgrown very quickly. That field will be turned over to nature, and the boundary markers there will be reinforced.

2. Seeding

The details concerning wildflower seeding at Batz was discussed above.

3. Bluebird Houses

This item was also discussed above.

V. New Business

A. Eagle Scout Proposal

There is a Scout interested in putting “bee hotels” in at the Batz Property. However, this is not a practice that DEEP recommends due to the low percentage of uptake in the hotels, the maintenance needs, and the concern for what kind of bee species takes root in them.

Ms. Anderson is waiting to hear back, and she is planning to mention making a trail at Crystal Ridge, and some benches, instead, or making a nesting area for ground bees that the Committee would mark off to help protect, which could be done at Batz or Ellington Highlands. Another potential project would be a solar pump. Mr. Palshaw also suggested picnic benches at Blueberry Hill on Crystal Ridge.

VI. Subcommittee Reports

A. Treasurer: There was no update, though Ms. Anderson let Ms. Amsel know that the foam she requested to replace some rope that was breaking down is in.

B. Maintenance

Ms. Amsel referenced the maintenance list and asked the Committee to add anything else they can think of. She recognized that it is a lot, but hopefully other community groups can help.

Ms. Allen asked why the Batz bridges are being moved. Ms. Amsel explained that the short one is beginning to fall in, and that the larger one is over a much smaller area. She admitted that it wasn't an emergent problem, but one that can be easily solved by just moving them.

1. Clean-Up Day – April 6th at Crystal Ridge with Boy Scouts and Green Earth Club

The Boy Scouts and Green Earth Club are committed to helping, and Ms. Anderson is planning to get the word out even more. She noted that there are some volunteers that have already expressed interest in being involved.

Ms. Anderson shared that there should hopefully be enough people to split into several groups, which may include trail cleanup, mulching, raking, etc.

C. Community Outreach**1. Ginny Apple Talks**

- a. **Reptiles and Amphibians** - This was well attended.
- b. **Minks, Muskrats, Beavers, and Otters – March 26th, Hall Memorial Library, 6:30 pm** - This event is upcoming.

2. Congregational Church Talk Update

Ms. Wambolt-Gulick shared that the talk was well attended, notably by members of the Batz family that donated the parcel to the Committee. Ms. Allen noted that the group was unaware of much of the work done by the Committee. Ms. Wambolt-Gulick mentioned that they asked about accessibility in the trails, and Ms. Anderson discussed the more accessible trails, but did note the difficulty in making them more accessible. Ms. Anderson suggested adding braille to help with some accessibility, but overall the Committee is limited in what can be done/added.

3. Earth Day – April 20th, Town Green, 10am-2pm

- a. **Set Up 8:00-9:00 am**
- b. **Photo Board**
- c. **Members to Set Up/Work Table**

Ms. Allen, Ms. Anderson and Ms. Amsel are available to help.

4. Ellington Youth Services – Bring a Buddy/Neighbor Walk for National Public Health, Saturday, April 13th (rain date April 14)

Ms. Anderson noted that the Committee hasn't heard back yet about which trail has been chosen.

5. CT Trails Day – June 1st and 2nd – Confirm Details

Ms. van Zelm confirmed that the Committee is planning to do the Windermere Trail; at least two members will be needed to lead the walk. Ms. Allen is willing to help, as is Ms. van Zelm.

Ms. Anderson described where the recommended parking should be, and the route she would take to show some high-interest features. 10:00 am on June 1 would be a good time and date for the event.

The Boy Scouts are going to lead a walk at 1:00 pm at Crystal Ridge.

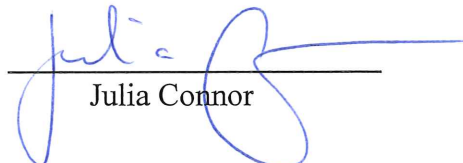
6. Bird Walk at Batz – May 11th (rain date May 12) – 7:30 am

Ms. Anderson reminded the Committee of this upcoming event. Ms. Allen is concerned that it may be too late, and there may be too many leaves.

VII. Adjournment

MOVED (VAN ZELM), SECONDED (ALLEN) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADJOURN THE TRAILS COMMITTEE MEETING AT 7:55 PM.

Prepared by Deanna Wambolt-Gulick; submitted by


Julia Connor