

Town Forest Committee Minutes May 3, 2013

Present: Peter Brewer, Sharon Cutler, Paul Doucette, Shirley Smith, Bill Dakai

The meeting was called to order at 10:25 AM

Sharon made a motion to approve the minutes from February 4, 2013. Peter seconded the Motion, all were in favor and the motion passed.

Connecting the Town Forest

Sharon passed around a map of Mendon that showed the proximity of the Town Forest to 168 acres in Mendon on the Mendon/Blackstone Town line and the 150 acre Wood property that are both part of an 800 acre tract of land that straddles the Mendon and Blackstone town line. The Mendon side of this area is called the Inman Hill Wildlife Conservation Area. The committee discussed various ways to connect the Town Forest to this area either by way of the power line or easements. Peter kept the map and will try to further investigate the matter. Peter described an I Phone AP invention that could be very valuable. Shirley showed the committee maps with locations of parcels that could be connected. These were from the Board of Trustees meeting at Cormier Woods and she said would have copies of them for everyone at the next meeting.

Department of Recreation (DCR) Grant

Project Selection Criteria: Shirley passed out information on how DCR would evaluate and select proposals. These included a demonstration of a need for the project, a description of a realistic trail project, creation of a trail system with public benefits, and trails that minimize the impact to natural and cultural resources and actively facilitate a variety of compatible trail uses.

Mendon Town Forest Grant Requests: Signs were the first item. Entrance signs would be needed on Tower Road and at the Southwick Zoo parking lot. Peter thought that a sign or kiosk at the historical Thomas Taft Saw and Shingle Mill would be especially important. There are also other historic sites within the Forest. Trail signs would also be a top priority. The committee discussed the various kinds of trails that could be marked for specific uses such as hiking, horseback riding, and mountain biking. Shirley mentioned that a review of grants that had been authorized showed that the inclusion of a public benefit seemed to increase the chance of approval for the grant. As relates to the Mendon Town Forest, these could be a snowmobile trail and a handicapped accessible trail. There were mixed feelings on snowmobiles. Shirley passed out information on situations where trails may have to be closed because of habitat or erosion considerations. Bill Dakai will give the committee an idea of how many signs would be necessary at the next meeting. This would give a basis for a cost estimate. In addition, the committee would need the costs of kiosks at the entrances for maps, rules, and any other information. Shirley said the next round of grants is in February of 2014 but it would be good to get started on this. She had also read that the grant money had been increased from \$600,000 to about one and a half million. This could be an indication of the high state priority for trail projects.

Parking Lot: Peter suggested that a parking area at the tower site should be included in the grant and the committee agreed. Other items touched on were the necessity of public relations to let people know about this valuable town resource that could revitalize Mendon as a tourist destination with the potential economic benefits.

Southwick Trail Entrance: The committee continued its meeting at the location of the proposed entrance from the Southwick Zoo parking lot to the main trail. It was decided that this would be toward the far end of the parking lot where an old wood road led to a bridge. From there the trail would continue to the Taft Mill site and the main trail.

Bill Dakai will flag the trail and work on clearing part of it. The Mendon Troop 44 Boy Scouts will do the remaining trail. Bill lives close by just over the Mendon Town line in Millville, has intimate knowledge of the forest, and an impressive resume in trail building. He is active in creating and maintaining more than a hundred miles of trails in Southbridge, Uxbridge, Northbridge, Millbury and Sutton. He was also involved with the mountain bike course creation for the Greenway Challenge in 2009 when they designed and built the trail over Goat Hill in Uxbridge and a course thru the Blackstone Gorge. In 2012 they created a course thru the Diamond Hill SP in RI and this year they have been asked to develop and build a course thru the Buck Hill management area in RI. Bill is a member of New England Mountain Bike Association, the International Mountain Bike Association, and "Team Bums" (www.teambums.com) Mountain Bike Club. He says he is just a retired guy that loves the outdoors and has plenty of time to do things that help others(with less time) to get out and enjoy their environment.

Sharon Cutler informed the committee that she may not be able to continue being a member. All committee members expressed their sincere regret at this news and hoped that there was a chance she could continue. If not, it was thought that, since our projects will engender excitement and enthusiasm in the community, it would not be difficult to find someone to fill Sharon's place.

Peter made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Paul seconded the motion, all were in favor and the meeting adjourned at 11:30 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Shirley Smith