

Town Forest Committee

Minutes

February 4, 2013

Present: Peter Brewer, Sharon Cutler, Paul Doucette, Shirley Smith, Justine Brewer

The meeting was called to order at 10:10 AM.

Paul made a motion to elect Sharon as Chairman. Peter seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed. Sharon made a motion to appoint Shirley to act as secretary. Peter seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed.

Committee Goals: Discussion of long term goals centered around creating an extensive system of trails that would connect the Mendon Town Forest with Cormier Woods, the Nolet property, Meadow Brook Woods, Quissett Wildlife Management Area, the Daniels Farm, the Wood property, and other protected land parcels in Mendon. Peter pointed out that, with easements through the Southwick Zoo, this could add up to about 1600 acres of protected greenway.

Sharon said that the most important first step would be to put together a map that would show all of the relevant properties in Mendon, Blackstone and Uxbridge. Shirley agreed to look into this.

Justine offered to contact Jim Reitsma of Blackstone Valley National Heritage and invite him to come to a meeting.

The committee touched on the possibility that all of these interconnected forest lands could one day become a National Park with the entrance at the Mendon Town Forest. Peter suggested that the old Dance Hall foundation in the Forest could be the site of a Visitor Center.

Peter thought the first short term goal should be a trail leading from the Southwick Zoo parking lot to the main trail within the Forest. The committee agreed and Shirley said that Kevin Rudden would have the Troop 44 Boy Scouts cut this trail as soon as it was flagged. Peter sketched out a plan of how the trail could connect to the remains of a saw mill and the future Visitor Center. There was some discussion of liability but it was determined that the Town has an umbrella liability policy and that the scouts also had liability insurance. Peter said he would check to sure.

Another topic brought up was Forest Management. Peter mentioned the disastrous "management program" from 2002 and he spoke highly of Masterson, the forester who manages his 300 acres. He thought this person would be a good manager of the Town Forest.

Shirley wondered if the management plan was required to be done by a DCR forester. The committee agreed that this would be a good issue to look into but, since the forest probably needed time to recover from the 2002 lumbering operation, it was not an urgent matter that needed immediate attention.

There was some discussion of grants. Shirley related information about the Department of Conservation and Recreation Greenways and Trails Program. They gave out \$600,000 in grants last year. These ranged from \$5,000 to \$60,000. Shirley said she would look into that and also check with friends at Riverways and Audubon. Sharon expressed interest in exploring the possibility of a grant from the Office of Travel and Tourism.

Other short term goals included putting together a Town Forest Trail Map and having them available at Town Hall, promoting the Town Forest as a recreational and historic destination. Paul mentioned that Mike Salvador was interested in having trails connect his land with the Town Forest. Sharon thought that Anne could help with maps. Shirley suggested that they could work on formulating a set of Rules of Use also that something could be done so visitors could enjoy the historically acclaimed view without climbing the tower.

Shirley related how she and Paul, with assistance from Jane Lowell and Amy DeWitt, had researched the Forest in the Town Hall vault. They had learned from old tax records that the spectacular mill ruins were the remains of a Saw and Shingle Mill owned by Thomas Taft in the early 1850's. Thomas had a house and 133 acres. Thompson Taft in 1849 and 1850 was taxed for 103 acres, a brick house, a wood house, another small house, 2 barns, 2 shops, 1 carriage, 1 crib, and an Observatory.

The committee agreed to meet in mid-March to explore the best location for the proposed trail from the Southwick parking lot.

Paul made a motion to adjourn; Peter seconded the motion and the meeting adjourned at 9:55 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Shirley Smith