

Stranahan Stewardship Committee Meeting

January 18, 2016 Old School House Commons 6:30 pm.

Attending: Stranahan Committee Members: Diana Batzel, Jim Brimblecombe, John Domey, Ed Jalbert, Jenny Warshow; Select Board Members: Laurie Colgan, Chris Martin, Andrew Perchlik; Guests: James Arisman, Bobbi Brimblecombe, Sarah Fowler, Brett Engstrom, Pat Martin, Anne Miller, Rich Phillips, Bob Popp, Anne Reed, David Warshow.

Message from Secretary: There were many people and many comments during the course of this meeting. I did my best to capture remarks and participate fully; I apologize in advance for any mistakes and will gladly receive corrections. Thank you.

The Chair (Jenny) opened the meeting at 6:30. She thanked the Select Board for meeting with us and passed out the agenda. She asked that an item be added to the agenda regarding the crossing of the ditch on the Thompson Road by snow machines.

The Secretary (Diana) passed out the minutes from Dec. 21, 2015 for the Committee to approve; Jenny added the date correction and the minutes were approved by vote.

Discussion: Ed Jalbert started the conversation by apologizing for the events that took place at the Committee's last meeting; he said there was no intent to deceive anyone; it was the worst meeting ever; he had no financial interests in the forest; he's come to dread the meeting; he hopes we can move on; maybe everyone should resign.

Sarah Fowler expressed that her take from a previous meeting is that the Committee is in a stalled out mode on some things, especially the logging issues and trail safety. There is a sentiment that nothing gets done.

Diana Batzel agreed with Sarah on part of her statement and voiced her concern that the Committee has become too adversarial, too personal, too bogged down in the issues of logging, and members are too entrenched in their stances. The concern is will the Committee be able to continue to function or will the situation erode further.

Pat Martin asked if there wasn't a management plan already in place that addresses the logging issues.

Jenny explained that the state forester did a draft plan in 2010 that treated the forest as if to be logged end to end; consideration of all the specially treated areas and multi-uses were not included. The forestry plan was an appendices to the actual management plan and only a draft.

Bob Popp offered the information that the original plan was done by Russ Barrett who has since retired and been replaced by Dan Singleton who would be a new resource for help.

Ed mentioned that he was trying to explore a new revenue source for the forest as possibly being a carbon credit. Some discussion on this issue with others making comments continued.

Jenny mentioned that she and Ed talked about forming a sub-committee to work out the logging issues.

Diana asked that we hear from the remaining Committee members to continue the agenda issues regarding the Committee.

John Domey liked the idea of Ed and Jenny working together to solve the logging issues and that this would help the Committee.

Jim Brimblecombe said there was no hidden agenda in the meeting that started this whole issue; there was no conspiracy theory; there was no illegal meeting. He checked with a lawyer from the Vt. League of Towns about cancellation of meetings. Some discussion of procedure from Bobbi Brimblecombe was added. Jim said he was fine with Ed and Jenny working on logging issues and that maybe it was time for some new blood on the Committee.

Bobbi Brimblecombe wanted to know whose idea it was to count the maple taps in the Town Forest which is the Brimblecombe's operation. Was it the Stranahan Committee or Conservation Commission?

Ed said "we" both should be performing due diligence on all the leases and reviewing them.

Pat Martin questioned the timing of doing this now.

Jenny interjected that it first came up when it was discovered that ten extra acres had been tapped that were not included in the original lease.

Jim stated that he had no problem with people counting the taps but they wasted their time doing it now since the trees are not tapped in and he pays by the spout installed to the tree. If someone would like to get an accurate count they should do so after the spout is installed into the tree.

In order to get the conversation back on track, Brett Engstrom read a part of the Management Plan regarding its purpose. The piece can be found under, "Purposes of the Management Plan". Brett felt this is clear in that we not view the forest in just economical ways but we incorporate ecological decisions.

Ed discussed that he did not feel the forest was just about making money but it had a component for that and that he felt sustainable forestry was important and important to him to up hold as a Committee member.

Diana tried to summarize what she felt was the responsibility of the Committee in regard to the Management Plan: to coordinate efforts in as many ways as the town's people would like to see it (the forest) used and make sure those uses are being sensitive to the preservation of the forest.

Jenny felt we should also look to the history of the land; how it was used by so many for recreation when Virginia Stranahan owned it and why she wanted to conserve it and also how many people made contributions to conserve it.

Ed felt our Committee needs to concentrate on more "focus", become more streamlined and efficient, more orderly.

David Warshow commented that if the Committee was to move away from being consensus based and to voting that more members should be added to the Committee.

Bobbi added that it would be beneficial to gain more awareness regarding open meeting laws. Additional comments from others were added.

Rich Phillips commented that we were having good ideas about structure that were all important. He also thought that having Ed and Jenny work on the logging issue was good but needs a time frame.

Ed and Jenny discussed back and forth the logging idea.

Rich reiterated that he felt it was a good idea if they can hash it out but they must be open to compromise, they need a time frame, and when it's done, it's done, leave it. In the operation of the Committee, he urged members to be a swing vote, stay open minded, evaluate facts, leave your dogma at the door.

Bobbi added that no decisions are decided alone or should be discussed privately, need to bring everything before the Committee.

Sarah felt having a time frame is important and that we should also make use of available resources.

Jenny made a motion to form a sub-committee consisting of she and Ed to work on the logging areas. John seconded; members voted to agree.

Anne Reed asked if this was a definitive decision. She would like to see the Stranahan Committee incorporated into the Conservation Commission. She proposed that the Stranahan Committee become a sub-committee of the Conservation Commission.

Bob Popp concurred and brought up the fact that in almost all other towns the town forest is administered by the conservation committees.

Jenny said the Committee would consider the idea.

Pat Martin felt we should review the town meeting report from when the town was asked about acquiring the Stranahan land for guidance.

Rich felt that the sub-committee of the Conservation Commission would look a lot like what we already have. He recommends a group with real focus on this land.

Jenny asked the Select Board if they had any questions at this point that had not been addressed.

Laurie Colgan wanted to ask about individual member's roles. What she felt she was seeing was that everyone was carrying their own flags, trying to win the race but not taking on the team responsibility to oversee the land and make recommendations to the Select Board. She asked each member to describe their role.

Jenny: initial organizer/fundraiser to purchase the land, for a lot of uses and for everyone's enjoyment; recreation and historical interfaces; chair of the Committee.

Diana: mostly recreational; as a small business owner likes to recommend the forest to guests; secretary of Committee.

Jim: represents sugaring industry; helped bike club this year.

John: represent snowmobiling though he has not been a member of the club for many years.

Laurie also wanted to know who looks out for the finances of the Town Forest. It was explained that half of the funds made from the Town Forest go to the general fund and half to the Stranahan fund up to a cap of \$5000 to pay for maintenance done on the land. Jenny gave out handouts showing how much the land had taken in and paid out in costs over the years while Bobbi gave account of what had been lost by not having that land on the tax list. Anne Reed asked if the forest had to bring in money. Pat Martin said it had been sold to the town that way. Rich said he was moderator at the time and did not think it was ever sold as a money-maker. Brett also felt there had been no specific statement at town meeting that we had to makeup the taxes. Ed said he thought there had to be a reasonable effort made to manage the forest and harvest timber. Chris Martin said the past Select Boards have never felt we lost money or that we have to make a debt up for lost revenues. Diana added that John and Jenny paid for maps, trail maintenance, and

recently two bridges out of their own funds. Laurie feels there needs to be more transparency regarding funds. Jenny asked if she could define more clearly what she meant. Laurie tried to clarify her meaning. The secretary lost focus at this point, sorry. With no further questions from the Select Board, conversation shifted to the added agenda item.

Jenny explained that pallets were laid across the recently dug trench on the Thompson Road by John Schmidt but that this was a less than ideal solution for the snow machines. The snowmobiles were going on unauthorized trails to avoid the area. Discussion ensued about the culvert problem. It was discussed that perhaps the trail should be closed to VAST as it is not safe. It would be helpful if someone from the snowmobile club was involved. They may want to do a temporary fix. Pat Ross was brought up as a stream alteration engineer that we could contact to help us in the spring.

Rich Phillips wanted to end the evening in saying that this was a good meeting; let's go forward from tonight and think about the procedures, compromises, and other ideas we talked about.

The Chair closed the meeting, the Select Board stayed to do their own review.

Actions: The Committee voted to start a sub-committee to handle the issue of logging. Details to be decided on.

Next meeting February 15, 2016 @6:30pm Old School House Commons; agenda to come.

Approved: by vote 2/15/16

Prepared by Diana Batzel