

Minutes of the March 9, 2022, 7:00 PM, Meeting of the Town Forest Committee

Town Forest Committee Minutes

March 9, 2022, 7:00 PM

Members Present: Brian Forestal, Mike Jones, Brian McGrattan, Cathy Rooney, Rob St. Germain, Cara Hulme, Mike Morrissey

Members Absent: None

Public Present: None

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 PM.

1. Approval of Minutes of February 23, 2022

The Ashland Town Forest Committee (ATFC) reviewed and amended the meeting minutes of February 23, 2022. A motion was made to approve the amended meeting minutes and seconded.

The motion was approved 5-0-0 by a roll call vote: Mr. Forestal: Aye, Mr. Jones: Aye, Mr. McGrattan: Aye, Ms. Rooney: Aye, Mr. St. Germain: Aye.

2. Wessels event

Mr. McGrattan said the cost of the event is covered by donations.

Mr. St. Germain said the Town Library is still sponsoring the talk portion of the event and will allow us to use the Library facilities.

Mr. St. Germain made a motion to segregate the funds solicited for the Tom Wessels talk and put those into the Public Programs Fund, and not use them for anything else. Ms. Rooney seconded the motion.

The motion was approved 4-0-1 by a roll call vote: Mr. Jones: Aye, Mr. McGrattan: Aye, Ms. Rooney: Aye, Mr. St. Germain: Aye. Mr. Forestal: Abstained.

Mr. St. Germain said Meena Jain, the Library Director, is handling the Talk ticketing via Evite. Ms. Hulme will handle the Walk ticketing via Evite. Currently the Library has 45 tickets available, but this may change if the COVID restrictions change, and the Walk has 35 tickets available.

Mr. Jones asked how the ATFC will distribute or offer any remaining tickets? Ms. Rooney suggested that the ATFC take any people without tickets, on the event day, on a first come first serve basis. Mr. McGrattan suggested the ATFC send out an invitation to the Friends of the Forest (FOF) list offering any remaining tickets to the FOF list first on a first come first serve basis.

Mr. St. Germain asked who from the ATFC was joining the Talk and Walk.

- Mr. Forestal: Talk 2 and Walk 2
- Ms. Hulme: Talk 0 and Walk 1
- Mr. Jones: Talk 1 and Walk 1

Minutes of the March 9, 2022, 7:00 PM, Meeting of the Town Forest Committee

- Mr. McGrattan: Talk 0 and Walk 2
- Mr. Morrissey: Talk 0 and Walk 0
- Mr. St. Germain: Talk 0 and Walk 0
- SVT: Talk 2 and Walk 2

Ms. Rooney said WACA will simulcast the Library Talk and record Walk. The Walk recording will take a few weeks to go through production after the event.

Mr. Jones suggested after this event the ATFC discuss the process of requesting donations and giving donors tickets. He indicated this approach does not seem appropriate for public events.

Ms. Hulme asked if we should have a promotional flyer for the Library kiosks and other areas, including the logos of the business sponsors.

3. Conservation Commission Issues

The Conservation Committee emailed two complaints to the ATFC about their concerns regarding:

- Routing the new North Trail potentially near vernal pools.
- Work on the Purple Trail, other than bridge work, was done near a wet lands.

The Conservation Committee also asked the Conservation Agent, Becca Solomon, to look into two complaints. Mr. St. Germain recently walked Ms. Solomon, through the areas of concern.

Routing the new North Trail

Mr. St. Germain told the ATFC that he had previously walked the former Conservation Agent through the proposed North Trail route. The northern end of North Trail off the White Trail is close to wetlands. The southern end is also potentially near wetlands. The Conservation Agent wants to review the proposed design in the spring and measure the distances to the wetlands.

During this discussion Mr. St. Germain informed the ATFC that a previous Notice of Intent (NoI) and Conservation Committee Order of Conditions covered the Rain Garden, the NEMBA bridge, the invasive species eradication, and some of the proposed route of the new North Trail.

Purple Trail Work

Mr. St. Germain informed the ATFC that he had previously discussed the Purple Trail work with the Conservation Committee. Ms. Solomon, the Conservation Agent, will review the results of her recent walk with Mr. St. Germain, with the Conservation Committee at their March 14 meeting.

Mr. Forestal reviewed a portion of the 310 Code of Massachusetts Regulations (CMR) 10.05 (2) (b) Conservation Rules with the ATFC, regarding trails on conservation land, and his interpretation of the “unpaved pedestrian walkways”. Mr. St. Germain asked Mr. Forestal to send a link to the ATFC to the CMR, which Mr. St. Germain will review and discuss with the Conservation Agent.

Notice of Intent

Mr. St. Germain suggested the ATFC pursue a Notice of Intent for any Maintenance and Operations work within the ATF. The cost for the NOI would be against the FY 23 budget and estimated to be \$250 but could be less if the town pays for notifications processing and postage. Ms. Rooney said the town usually picks up the cost of notifications and postage. Mr. St. Germain said he will check on whether the town will pick up these costs.

Based on the Notice of Intent, the Conservation Committee will issue an Order of Conditions. The Notice of Intent/Order of Conditions will cover the entire forest except for SVT land and the land in Framingham and will be good for 3 years. The Notice of Intent can then be extended at no cost.

Mr. St. Germain made a motion that he be authorized to work with the Conservation Agent, Ms. Solomon, to draft and file a Maintenance and Operations Notice of Intent. There will be a \$150 filing fee and possibly abutter notices and postage costs, not to exceed \$500.

The motion was approved 5-0-0 by a roll call vote: Mr. Forestal: Aye, Mr. Jones: Aye, Mr. McGrattan: Aye, Ms. Rooney: Aye, Mr. St. Germain: Aye.

Conservation Committee Complaints and the North Trail Discussion

Mr. St. Germain informed the ATFC that Ms. Rooney raised the complaints to the Conservation Committee. Mr. St. Germain said the ATFC has already approved the North Trail and a portion of the North Trail has already been approved by an Order of Conditions (OOC). Ms. Rooney outlined to the ATFC, the reasons why she went to the Conservation Committee.

Mr. St. Germain asked for the ATFC members thoughts on the Conservation Committee complaints and the North Trail.

- Mr. McGrattan said the ATFC needs to balance the public use of the land with keeping a contiguous habitat area for the animals. In response, Ms. Rooney thinks that contiguous habitat area is important.
- Mr. Forestal said there are already trails in the area of the planned North Trail, unofficial trails that people are using. Half of the proposed trail is an unmarked double track trail, that people use now. Mr. Forestal said the ATFC previously approved the ATF Stewardship Goals: which prioritized recreational goals ahead of habitat.
- Mr. Jones said the ATFC made and voted on these plans already and needs to follow through on them. He thought the concept of untouched lands is not correct, as these lands have previously been cut, farmed, and cut again. In response, Ms. Rooney outlined the Stewardship Plan and the need for contiguous animal habitat.
- Ms. Hulme said the ecological value of the land is higher without the trail, but the trail has been previously approved by the ATFC. Ms. Hulme said from the sustainability perspective people are going to want to more trails through the forest and between neighborhoods.
- Mr. Morrissey was disappointed that these issues were raised to the Conservation Committee and should have been brought to the ATFC first. With that, Mr. Morrissey agreed that the town has lost large areas of contiguous animal habitat in recent years, and if the North Trail vote came up today, and he had a vote, he would vote against it.

Minutes of the March 9, 2022, 7:00 PM, Meeting of the Town Forest Committee

- Mr. St. Germain said he did hear from some Conservation Committee members and from the Town Manager on the Ms. Rooney's complaint to the Conservation Committee. Mr. St. Germain said the ATFC is the steward of the ATF. The North Trail is designed to serve the public coming in from the Oak Street, the trail is mostly and unofficially established already, so it would not add much new disturbance. This proposed route is also designed to reduce some of the traffic on the heavily used White Trail.

4. Planning 1 – Tree Replacement

Mr. Jones said the ATFC cannot get beech and hickory trees of substantial size, and he suggested that we get smaller trees and cultivate them ourselves for 3-4 years in a "nursery area" and then move them into the ATF. Mr. Jones is looking for an accessible and sunny location, with a water source close by for this area. Locations considered were the Warren Woods, the Olive St Farm, the Elliot St. house/garage, the Cemetery and the DPW facility. The Cemetery and the DPW space were ruled out quickly.

Mr. McGrattan asked if we can grow the trees in the ATF deer enclosures. Mr. Jones said in the deer enclosures the small tree will be hard to keep track of, while the location is shady, and the soil is of lesser quality.

5. Miscellaneous Discussions

Mr. Jones informed the ATFC that he wants to move some public programs including:

- The invasive species walk from 6/18 to 6/11.
- The barbery removal from 4/16 to 4/23.
- The Rain Garden Photo Workshop from 7/16 to 7/9.

Mr. St Germain asked each ATFC member for a short description on each of their sessions. He will have these posted on the Towns Website.

Mr. Jones informed the ATFC that we have already purchased the 50 gallon tank with pump to water the trees. This was approved along with the tree project.

Mr. Morrissey informed the group that he had costs from Doodie Calls pet waste removal service, and he will share these via email.

Motion to Adjourn

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting and was seconded.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm.

Future Meeting Dates: March 23, April 13, April 27, May 18