



Town of Monkton  
Town Forest Committee

P.O. Box 12  
Monkton, VT. 05469-0012

Meeting Minutes

August 22, 2019, 6:00 pm

Attending: Jaime Schulte, John McNerney, Pete Dufault, Mark Boltz-Robinson (on Skype)  
Absent: None  
Guests: Bob Heiser (Vermont Land Trust), Ann Johnston-Miller (Monkton Conservation Commission), Susan Mahoney (Agricultural & Natural Areas Committee)

Jaime called the meeting to order at 6:18. Jaime will be the minutes-taker.

- 1) Bob Heiser is visiting from Vermont Land Trust on the topic of options for financing the acquisition of a town forest and some thoughts on what has worked for other towns as they went through this process.
  - a. VLT works on many town forest projects.
  - b. Community forests serve a diverse range of conservation and public values.
  - c. Expanding Forestland Ownership & Management Opportunities (for those who don't otherwise own forest)
  - d. Bringing Community together toward something positive

Examples of Town forests in Westford, Georgia, & Richmond.

- In the case of the Jackson Farm & Forest in Westford, VLT secured the property until the community could acquire it, because the landowners were eager to see the land sold.
  - a) \$630k budget. 150k VHCB, 180k VHCB Farmland, 65k private, \$185k town note, \$50k private fundraising.
- Georgia Town Forest (about 4 years ago)
  - a) Relatively remote. 179 acres. Large wetland. Natural Area focus. Outdoor Recreation.
  - b) Lead by the Conservation Commission. Absentee landowners. VLT Option Agreement
  - c) \$265k budget. \$132,500 VHCB, \$132,500 in the Georgia Conservation Fund.
- Andrews Community Forest in Richmond (~2 years ago)
  - a) VLT was very aware of this property and had been talking with the owners for 20+ years. Was 600 acres. Intergenerational transfer. Sold 2 acres with the farmhouse.
  - b) Lots of value for connectivity (adjacent to I-89 and Route 2). Added to the Chittenden County Uplands Conservation Project (about 10,000 acres).
  - c) 428 acres of forestland.
  - d) Appraisal, VLT Option agreement w/landowners, Community: What do you want to see here?, Town Vote, Town Forest Committee, Fundraising / Grant Writing
  - e) \$820k budget. \$250k donation from the owners, \$256k Federal Community Forest grant, \$100k VHCB, \$86k Open Space Institute, \$30k

- Conservation Alliance, \$75k Richmond Conservation Reserve Fund, \$13k private fundraising.
- Huntington is exploring a town forest
  - a) Existing Town Forest with challenging access
  - b) Recreation planning with the UCF
    - a. Community engagement
    - b. Surveys / Public Meetings
    - c. Strong sense of Community Priorities
  - c) The substantial community engagement has put them in a strong position when a parcel appears.
  - d) Connect with Landowners

#### A Few Considerations

- Forest examples:
  - a) Hinesburg Town Forest – 836 acres
  - b) The Watershed Center – ~1000 acres
  - c) Andrews – 428
  - d) Catamount Community Forest (Williston) – 393 acres
  - e) Mobbs Farm (Jericho) – 260
  - f) Westford Community - 160
- Federal Funding
  - a) \$4M fund, \$600k max for a project.
  - b) Federal Funding Criteria
    - a. Economic Benefits
    - b. Environmental Benefits
    - c. Forest-based Learning
    - d. Recreation Benefits
    - e. Public Involvement
    - f. Part of Landscape Initiative
    - g. Threat
- It is often too late when land is already on the market
- Frontload gathering community input / priorities

#### Discussion:

- Website for the federal program? Search for “Federal Community Forest Program”. CFP
- Incentives for landowners? Helps to preserve land that has been in their family. Legacy.
- Can the landowner stipulate conditions of use? Usually not, depends on the condition and funding sources. There would be a conservation easement on the property (usually from VLT)... something like it would continue to be forestland and open to the public. Approved forest management plan. Other conditions like no hunting might not work for some funding sources.
- One concern we might hear is that conserving land takes it off the tax rolls. Advantages of municipal vs. non-profit ownership of a town forest? Some non-profits wouldn't have to pay some taxes. It is true that the municipality loses the tax revenue if they own it, so it is a cost/benefit analysis. Usually it is a very small increase per taxpayer for the benefit of having the resource of a town forest. There can be some offsetting economic stimulus... place people want to live, recreation value, people visiting the forest and spending money in town, etc.
- Question on Current Use and some explanation of what it is.
  - a) John McNerney has materials/studies on how development doesn't necessarily improve rate rates. You have to provide as much in additional

services, so you don't necessarily come out ahead in terms of the tax base and town budget.

- Advice for us on how to proceed with the community input phase?
  - a) Classic approach of setting up some stations around a room with sticky dots for the things you like, etc. Allows for input from those who might not be comfortable speaking/debating. Low time commitment. Can drop by, give input, and head home vs a 2-hour meeting. Leave space for new ideas/comments we haven't thought of.
  - b) Can do a survey as well to reach more people.
  - c) Easier to do the conversation without a specific parcel in consideration yet.
- There should be some input on management of a forest from the community, according to the stated uses/purposes, but science and state resources are also relevant. Conservation Commission often runs the land management plan and get it approved by the Selectboard (like the Pond Brook Management Area).
- What pitfalls should we be aware of?
  - a) Some towns have scrambled and used a lot of community energy when a parcel came on the market and they were not prepared for it.
  - b) As scary as it can be to engage with getting the full breadth of input/involvement from the community it is very important. People need to be heard.
- Each town seemed to come up with some funds from a town fund or fundraising. ANAC could help with some of that, which would.

**2) Review draft write-up of our description/purpose on the town Web site.**

- a. Draft is good with one minor edit, which Jaime will send to John.

**Adjournment**

Jaime moved to adjourn. John seconded. All were in favor (4-0-0). Adjourned at 7:30.

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Jaime Schulte**