

MINUTES
Trails Committee
January 4, 2016

Attending: Norma & Ron Wiesen, Dave Mitchell, Doug McClure, Gail Johnson, Wayne Renaud, Norma Spaulding, Emmet Avery, Helen Beattie, Nicole Miller, Eric Remick, Sue Trecartin Guests: Jessica Manchester and Judy Bellairs

1. **Full Moon Snowshoe:** Elinor Lanxner prepared a handout that Ron distributed for a snowshoe on Saturday, January 23, 7:00-9:00 PM. Norma S. and Sue will lead the walk. We need gas for the cabin; Ron has made arrangements for Irving to deliver.
2. **Trail Conditions.** Very good. A lot of walkers, skiers. Eric and Wayne put brush over water bars, groomed.
3. **Minutes.** Dave moved the Minutes for December 7; Nicole seconded. Approved.
4. **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).** Eric, Norma and Ron attended a fairly adversarial meeting on December 17 with Ben Notterman, Marc Luneau, GMTCC Director Sherry Lussier, the two Hazen principals Mike Moriarty and John Craig, and briefly Chris Miller. A second meeting will be held on January 14. Ron feels that this is the best opportunity to stress the need for a mediator who will be available going forward. The principals at Hazen are very reticent to step in as mediator. Norma summarized the big picture: For a long time, there has been too little communication between the two interests, and there have not been forward-looking conversations. That has caused tension on multiple levels. Certainly, if we can get to a place where we are talking on a regular basis so that we know each other's plans and have some sense of understanding the other better, then we can have fewer difficulties. The previous meeting of this sort in 2008 was called by the Superintendent; perhaps looking at a relationship on the level of policy with the superintendent would be advantageous. At that meeting, we started out with what we care about—a resource for the community, nature, etc.—a common desire that gave us a good foundation for assuming best intentions. In the forthcoming meeting, we need to back up and recreate a relationship of trust. Ron did send Sherry all of the documentation from previous meetings. Ideally, we want to see GMTCC and the Trails in a partnership, which a lot of that documentation shows. It has been lost because we are all maybe focusing on our immediate interests rather than the commitments from 2008. We need to bring back that piece of shared vision and make different choices to go forward in the future without blame or shame, determining the current responsibilities, the agreements in place, the goals of both groups. We need a smaller group at the next meeting, bringing in Supt. Joanne LeBlanc, something that creates clarity about the nature of the meeting and keeps us from going back. Then bring in more people but first try to establish where we are and the current goals. GMTCC needing to make money from the sugaring operation seems like a conflict of interest. We can't rectify that, but we can rectify a relationship that must have good communication. They don't want to do harm. They helped build the trails. Helen volunteered to set an agenda and be at the next meeting that names the goals and creates the terms. This process has to be well managed and the premise has to be starting anew. Those interested will meet about this attempt to build a better relationship with GMTCC and set out our desires, goals, and needs on Monday the 11th at 6:30 PM either here or at the new Senior Center. Norma will call the Town Manager's Office and email folks who are interested. It would be productive to have the GMTCC group come to the meeting prepared with their needs as well. There should be an advance agenda so everyone feels prepared and is on the same page.
5. **REACH.** Nicole reported that Ericka put out a ski registration. It looks like they can get six weeks in starting January 16th to Feb. 20th. Then we'll have to see what March skiing looks like. Coverage for the cabin 9-11 AM on Saturdays: 1-9 Ron & Norma, 1-16 Gail, 1-23 Dave, 1-30 Wayne.

Website. Doug McClure has been working hard on the website. To view the new working site, go to: <http://ht.dexterous.io/trails>. Gail, Norma W., Lenore, and Sue met with him at the House of Pizza. Doug is working with Dave on the map, using USGS data; the weather is accurate but he would like a way to report snow cover. Most of the layout is done, but he needs data. A meeting of the group will take place soon.

6. **Hardwick Town Recreation Coordinator, Jessica Manchester.** Jessica was at a prior meeting and asked if we could do a brainstorm to get a general consensus of what needs she can fill and how she can be involved. How do we view this position being most beneficial for recreation in the town? As far as grant writing, Jessica understood we wanted funding for people to help with grooming, equipment replacement on a schedule, and the connector trail. The Rec. grant likes to fund building trail; they also have precedent to fund grooming, as they have to VAST, as contracted labor.

*Currently, the grooming is done by volunteers—Wayne, Eric, Brendan, Dave. If the connector trail gets built, then we will probably get help from Craftsbury.

*Some things that we struggle with all the time are being able to fund and have equipment for the maintenance of the trails particularly in winter. It's the larger equipment although we've managed thus far. We can handle the small. Eric and Lenore have been getting prices on grooming equipment. A 2-stroke is \$11,000 and 4-stroke is \$12,000. The 4-stroke is better for the climate and the operator. We need the oldest one replaced in the next couple of years. We have \$5,200 in the capital fund, a good place to be when seeking matching funds. We will need to replace the Ginzu groomer also, another \$6,000. Both of our machines were serviced recently for \$340 and they are being used.

*The connector trail to Highland Lodge. Jessica will meet with one or two people to lay out what that project would bring and discuss support for grant funding.

*What about trail building for single track? We've been talking about hiring someone to come in and build but haven't worked through it, remaining cognizant of landowner relations.

*Are we anywhere near optimizing a communication strategy? There are a lot of links that can be done with the website; we have 11 miles of trail rather than 6 miles. We need to get the word out, then we start responding to demand. There are two threads: getting the word out locally to try to draw community members to the trails and being a resource beyond the community that we can be really proud of. To market the trails online, we need to be aware that more traffic means more maintenance.

*There are also an exercise course and a low ropes course that is a potential profit-generating course. For the first time, we have Hazen principals who get what a resource is there. We don't have trained facilitators or in-house people. The elementary PE teacher Mike Baker has an indoor ropes course certified by High 5. We had a trained REACH coordinator at one time. That's a huge development possibility. Helen is willing to meet with Jessica and the two principals to give the history and see if there is a possibility for revival. Nicole will look through REACH files to see if there is anything relevant. There are gaps after REACH in activities for our youth.

*The issue of counting trail usage was left with Chris Ingram to check into the Stowe bike path's method. It would make sense to apply for research and development money this year and equipment next year.

7. **Big Community Planning Meeting January 20.** Paul Costello from Rural Community Development leads communities to brainstorm their priorities and narrow to a few projects to focus on. Example: Johnson has revamped downtown; that all came about through this process. For example, if we're talking about recreation, there may be someone from Sen. Leahy's office that can secure money. There was an initial steering committee meeting last month to identify nine broad topics for discussion, and brainstorm as many names as possible associated with them. Most people here will be called and everyone should come. There will be three locations with three simultaneous topics. Topics will be in the *Gazette* and on Front Porch Forum. Also a community dinner will be held in conjunction.

8. **Scavenger Hunt.** Gail will lead a Nature Scavenger Hunt on Sat., Jan. 30, 1:00-2:30 PM for all ages.

9. Judy Bellairs uses the trails every day and is visiting this meeting for the first time because of the cutting. She has been involved in Sierra Club and environmental issues for 30 years. She feels the trails are a public resource and they are being degraded.

Meeting adjourned at 7:21 PM

Respectfully submitted,
Sue Trecartin

Next Meeting: Feb. 1, 2016, 5:30 PM, at the Memorial Building