

Parks and Natural Resources Committee

Tuesday January 21, 2020 7:00 PM
Mansfield Town Hall Conference Room B

Minutes

1. Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 PM

Roll Call

Attending: Jim Morrow (Chair), Ken Feathers (secretary), Quentin Kessel (Cons. Com. Rep.), Sue Harrington, Michael Soares, Julianna Barrett (alt.), Vicky Wetherell (by phone)

Not present but on committee roster: Tom Harrington

Town Staff Present: Jennifer Kaufman

2. Brief Review of On-Line Meeting Software

Town staff presented an overview of new software to be used for minutes and agenda of our meetings as the town migrates away from paper documents. The goal is to have standardized formats and access. The software will be accessible through mansfield.civicweb.net, and all our documents will have both "public access" and "confidential" versions, with access to the confidential versions regulated by login credentials issued to the committee. Implementation is pending.

3. Opportunity for Public comment

No members of the public were present.

4. Review of Minutes

1. The Minutes of the November 19, 2019 meeting were approved, with modification of the close to read "respectfully submitted" (moved Kessel, second Soares)
2. The minutes of the November 16, 2019 special meeting were approved, with modification to add that Soares was not present (moved Feathers, seconded S. Harrington)
A tangent discussion ensued with a question from Soares regarding committee membership; Town staff listed current members and indicated that there is one vacancy for an alternate due to a resignation in the fall.
3. It was pointed out that the January 10, 2020 meeting did not have a quorum, and should be recharacterized as notes rather than minutes, with no approval therefore necessary.

5. New Business

1. *Mansfield Dog Park – Presentation from Community Members*

Presentation was tabled to the February meeting because the group was not present

6. Continuing business

1. *Simpson-Wood Preserve Projects.*

Morrow reported on the January 10 trip that he and Feathers took to go out and mark final trail layout in areas identified as needing work during the November 16 special meeting. Feathers had earlier walked the property with John Hankins, and Morrow and Feathers confirmed and finalized some suggested routing solutions on January 10, with the results summarized for today's meeting.

Kaufman reported that town staff and Morrow met with Monty Grable, an eagle scout, about the details of a proposed project, and the decision was to refocus the project from a bridge crossing a wet area on the north-east part of the loop trail to instead ensuring that the entry

point and trail beginning had adequate provisions, such as a boardwalk or other low structure, to cross the major wet area near the road. A picture of a metal grid “boardwalk” was shown as a concept. Discussion focused on the need for any structures placed by the project to ensure that they did not impede any emergency vehicle access or future parking development. Wetherell advocated for expecting to need to develop parking at the trail head to address safety concerns with crossing Route 89 from the Mount Hope parking area. Discussion continued to note that any signage also should be installed to not impede emergency access or future parking development, including sightlines. Town staff will plan to meet on-site with town fire safety personnel to ensure that any boardwalk is appropriately placed.

2. *Simpson-Wood Draft Management Plan*

See note under 3

3. *Moss Sanctuary Management Plan*

Discussion of both Management Plans considered the need for a semi-generic template, as general as possible, that references an attachment listing priorities specific to the parcel. Soares and Feathers agreed to meet before the next meeting to develop a framework, with town staff needing 24 hours to publish notice of the meeting, tentatively on 4 February.

4. *Winter/Spring Programming*

Report by S. Harrington:

The winter tree walk got 12 people.

The winter birding program was cancelled due to low registration.

Discussion covered the need to better define the process for cancellation.

A more general discussion of fees occurred:

It was pointed out that materials available in print and on the web were inconsistent in listing fees, and town staff agreed that this needed to be improved.

Harrington pointed out that free programs were well attended (example: tree walk), but programs with fees often were undersubscribed (example: winter birding). Discussion raised a general question of why programs that specifically addressed our committee’s educational mission needed a fee, especially if they took place in the parks and did not use the community center facilities. Town staff indicated that the fees stemmed from the fee-based model of the community center, that fees were used to pay instructors, and there was a waiver process for individuals. The committee’s suggestion was to look into the potential for a blanket waiver for programs that could be considered as sponsored by PANRC, rather than the community center, especially if there was no facility usage at the community center and/or the instructor was a volunteer not seeking reimbursement for their time.

(Editorial note: absent from discussion was any consideration of a need for liability coverage.)

Upcoming programs:

- A Mother’s Day bird walk is planned
- Trails Day is June 7th, and the plan is to repeat the popular “Unnatural History” activity at Merrow Meadow that was run last year. Timing will be June 7 from 1-3 pm.
- Also for Trails Day Merrow and Charlotte Pyle will run a guided walk of the Simpson-Wood Preserve trail loop. Timing will be June 6 from 9:30 to 11:30 am

Discussion of coordination of the two Trails Day events finalized the proposed times noted above for inclusion in the community center brochure.

7. Communications

1. Other Committee Minutes

Consensus of the group was that there were no particular issues concerning our committee in the minutes listed in the agenda

2. Member Updates

- Morrow continued discussion reporting observations regarding trails at Simpson-Wood Preserve. Some wet areas may be able to be improved with minimal drainage modifications of the old logging roads, after obtaining appropriate wetland permissions.
- A discussion of mountain bikes occurred, stemming from observation that there did not seem to be current bike activity at Simpson-Wood Preserve. Town policy is that we cannot prohibit them, but won't encourage their use except in specific preserves with appropriately designed trails. Feathers suggested a need for a long term monitoring study of trails, to identify any potential impact, perhaps coordinated with UConn.

3. Staff Report

- The town is continuing to try for a National Park Service technical assistance grant. An NPS person will meet with the town to discuss an application to consolidate all trails information.
- There are two large subdivision applications pending, one from Mansfield Housing Authority and one from JE Shepard. The committee will have referral with opportunity to comment on JE Shepard, which has some identified cultural resources to address, but the Housing Authority is exempt because it is under statute 830g for affordable housing.

Discussion ensued as to why the Housing Authority should not have to address how they conform to Mansfield's goals for conservation and sustainability. Town staff indicated that stormwater and wetlands requirements apply, but for other considerations the burden of proof is on the Town to show a problem, not on the applicant to show it conforms. The committee was referred to the 12/2 PZC packet for additional information on the project.

4. Correspondence as noted in package

8. Executive session in accordance with CGS section 1200(6)(D)

There were no issues requiring an executive session, and none was held

9. Future Meetings

10. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:29 PM by consensus (moved Kessel, seconded S.Harrington)

Respectfully Submitted
Ken Feathers, Secretary