

Parks and Natural Resources Committee

Tuesday February 18, 2020 7:00 PM
Mansfield Town Hall Conference Room A

Minutes -- FINAL

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.), Tom Harrington, Sue Harrington, Michael Soares, Juliana Barrett (alt.), Vicky Wetherell (by phone)

Not present but on committee roster: none

Town Staff Present: Jennifer Kaufman, Jillene Woodmansee

Also attending: Jennifer Thomas, who is a potential candidate for the vacant position and came to observe the meeting and introduce herself.

2. Opportunity for Public comment

No members of the public were present except for representatives of the Mansfield Dog Park group; see new business.

3. Approval of Minutes

1. The Minutes of the January 21, 2020 meeting were approved, with modification of spelling in one location (moved S.Harrington, seconded Kessel)
2. The February 4, 2020 meeting was a working group meeting that did not have a quorum, and is characterized as notes rather than minutes, with no approval therefore necessary.

4. New Business

1. Mansfield Dog Park – Presentation from Community Members

Attending community members: Sonya Conrod, Jean Johnsen, Katie Clauson, John Clauson, and Maurice LaPointe.

The dog park group representatives expressed some frustration regarding identifying the administrative place in town the next “approval” is necessary to move the project forward; the town council has recently sent them to the PANR committee for an approval. The group indicated that grants are available if a piece of land is approved.

Morrow asked what the dog park group sought from the Committee, and the response was that they would like us to identify and approve a specific location. The committee indicated that a specific location has not yet been identified, and noted the committee is a town advisory committee that makes recommendations, not approvals.

The Committee asked the dog park representatives to explain the specific requirements needed for a parcel to be appropriate for a dog park, and the nature of the needed improvements. The basic requirement is a public and fenced space of about an acre, with an “airlock” gate system, that is divided into separate areas for large and small dogs. Various surface materials that are suitable include wood chips and turf. Some shade would be desirable, and a water supply for a bubbler would be an asset. Dog park representatives indicated that the park would be an asset to the town and provide a place for socialization. People are expected to be responsible for their own animals, in the same manner for children at a playground, and thus there is expected to be limited town liability. (In the reported experience of dog park representatives there are only occasional bad actor users.)

Committee members noted and discussed factors to be considered in determining a location include the impact on surrounding wildlife and the neighborhood, impact on wetlands, erosion potential, waste management, parking, and access. Dog park representatives answered questions as needed. Several parcels were identified and discussed; one concept mentioned and considered most viable was to site the dog park at Schoolhouse Brook Park, where there is existing supporting infrastructure. A field trip to further explore the potential for a dog park at this location will be scheduled by town staff for after the start of Daylight Savings time.

The committee unanimously adopted a motion (moved Kessel, seconded [undocumented]) that:

The PANR Committee supports in principal a dog park in Mansfield and the committee shall evaluate possible locations for a dog park to be established and make a recommendation.

Morrow reminded the dog park representatives that even once a location for a dog park is identified and recommended by the committee, it was up to the dog park representatives to advocate for the dog park with the Town Council, who would be the final approvers. It would be up to the dog park proponents to sell the project. This might include showing how it can be built using grants to limit significant town expense other than provision of the location. Morrow pointed out that the council would likely request information on how operation and maintenance would dependably be provided by volunteers as a critical point for the ability to maintain a dog park without putting additional future demands on town staff.

5. Continuing business

1. *Simpson-Wood Preserve Updates and Dedication Date.*

Morrow reported that the trails have had blazes painted, but some areas may need to be reviewed for clarity of marking for guiding people unfamiliar with the trail. Morrow will create a list of needed signs, and geolocate areas where hazard trees may need removal.

Town staff reported that, when they met to discuss the layout of the entry area, Public Works personnel indicated that as an effect of the mild winter the town had available resources and could step up to do improvements to provide parking and boardwalk access across the wet areas at the entry and on the southwest part of the loop trail. Work has already started. The eagle project slated for the wet entry area will instead be to install a bridge over the northeast wet area crossing.

Town staff presented a mockup of the proposed sign at the parking area entry. It was suggested that “no hunting” be added, and that a second sign listing the rules be placed where it would be more visible once people were out of their cars and entering the parcel on foot.

The dedication is being planned for the fall, to tie into the beginning of WalkTober. Tentatively it is being planned for the last Sunday of September. The committee noted that this is the weekend of Yom Kippur but thought that an event scheduled during the day would not conflict with the holy day, which starts on Sunday evening.

2. *Simpson-Wood Draft Management Plan*

See note under 3

3. *Moss Sanctuary Management Plan*

Feathers indicated that as a result of the February 4 working session a draft template was being developed to provide a framework for management goals, with details to be separately listed for a parcel by the committee and town staff to provide flexibility. A draft is expected for the next meeting.

4. *Winter/Spring Programming*

Report by S. Harrington:

The winter birding program was cancelled due to low registration.

The winter tracking program had people sign up, but all those registered were no-shows, even though a fee had been paid.

A more general discussion of registration logistics ensued:

Town staff reported that they had cleared fee exemptions for PANRC programs with 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.

The committee asked if there was any auto-reminder feature in the registration software that might reduce the potential for “no shows”.

Upcoming programs:

- A Mother’s Day hike 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. Although the event did not make the P&P Spring program brochure, it is listed on the CFPA schedule.
- From prior month, a guided hike on the Simpson Wood preserve is planned for June 6th.

6. Communications

1. Various communications

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

2. Member Updates (not listed on agenda)

- The presence of numerous dead trees on the southern access trail at Mount Hope Park was noted. It was suggested that the trail could just be abandoned by encouraging walking at the edge of the field. This was discussed and rejected as a concept because it would negatively affect agricultural use of the field more than the current unmarked trail. To keep the trail in the woods usable, Kaufman will put tree management on the task list for town action.

3. Staff Report (not listed on agenda)

- Beaver management at Schoolhouse Brook Park resulted in removal of 6 beavers, which should reduce the impact on trees and trail flooding, and limit pollution impact upstream from the swimming area. There are a variety of management tools for longer term, and these tools were discussed on a recent webinar attendee by staff. The selection of which management approach is best will be unique to each problem area. The town will need to budget for ongoing management of beaver populations.
- There is unexpended money in our committee budget and town staff indicated to the committee that they wanted to use the money to create better access to the online trail guides by modifying the website structure. The committee concurred that it was desirable to have a more direct path to the trail maps and this was an appropriate use of funds.

4. Correspondence as noted in package

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

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

8. Future Meetings

9. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:52 PM by consensus (moved T.Harrington, seconded Kessel)

Respectfully Submitted
Ken Feathers, Secretary