

Parks Commission Meeting Notes, 12/16/25

Andrew, Lincoln, Emily, Jessa, Kassia, Alec, Keir

Jim Coppock, Arthur, Kip

Minutes from Nov. 18 approved.

Agenda for Dec. 16 meeting approved.

No public comment

Staff updates

Alec

- No incident reports for this month
- Not a lot of staff updates, tree work and winter prep. Ski program is up and going, happy to be grooming this early in the season. Don't have the connector trail decked yet but they're going to do that tomorrow. Very exciting.
- Sparrow Farm trail that leaves the park and goes up to E. Montpelier. There are 3 steep sections on that trail, one right at the top, one in the middle, one about a quarter of the way up, then one near the bottom. East Montpelier trails has some really nice new energy, they redecked a new boardwalk this summer. So they reached out to me and I met with them because the park boundary now extends over the southern part of that trail where they want to do a reroute. Part of it also goes through the East Montpelier town forest. And they reached out to Alec because part of it is on park land, and they want to do some work to make some of those steep sections less steep. Alec will bring a map to share the details next meeting. Jessa asks possibility of rerouting. Alec will bring more info for next meeting. Bill and Sheryl Plum are both on East Montpelier trails board, Lincoln is working on a meeting with them and that will be a good platform for getting together with them.
- Andrew asks about mountain bikes on E. Montpelier trails; only some are open to bikes
- MAMBA is in discussion with BTI about more trails in town forest.

Jessa question

- What's happening with the City Plan?
- Alec: it was adopted by City Council, it won the best plan in VT and in New England, and now it's going on to become the best plan in the U.S.
- Jessa would like to look back at the park stuff in that plan—Greenprint, etc.
- Alec: there were some statutory requirements to move things along and what we wanted to be in there went in.

Alec

- Capital Campaign is going great, we're getting some donations
- The only Commissioners who haven't answered the questions yet are Emily and Kassia
- There are a couple people who want to support MYCC, one person who wants to put up \$10K per year, but we need \$30K per year. Last few years of every year could be a good time to push that, could use Commissioners' support on that. We'll reposition social media posts to focus on MYCC for that period at the end of the year
- Let's schedule the FPF posts!
- Monday the 22nd through end of year—every other day, for posts on MYCC

- Dec. 22 - Emily
- Dec. 24 - Lincoln
- Dec. 26 - Andrew
- Dec. 28 - Kassia
- Dec. 30 - Jessa
- City budget: they got their first look at the budget last Wednesday and are discussing it in depth. We didn't ask for anything other than the Americorps funding. They essentially presented a budget that accounts for inflation. Our Americorps money is in the service-level budget, which is 10% more. So hopefully that will stay in, it's up to them to make the decision. We have some funding in the Capital budget to try to move forward with the outhouse and parks trails. Those funds don't usually get touched, but it's up to them. And if advocacy is needed, that's up to the Commission to do that.
- The budget survey goes out and every year it's a little demoralizing because people are always going to prioritize infrastructure and safety. We get killed on the question of which one you would cut—but the one about which one you're most satisfied with, we always kill that one! So it would be nice to be able to tweak that survey or its interpretation to reflect more quality of life stuff
- No one is digging through public works looking at what to cut, and trees are technically part of public works, and it makes sense to combine parks and trees but the staff is so thin. We're basically managing the city's natural resources, and we own these things, we need to provide some maintenance and stewardship. One comment on the survey was like, we shouldn't buy trucks for anyone but DPW, but people don't really understand the needs.
- The Commission could write another letter to the City Council helping them to read the survey correctly and summarizing all the value of the parks. Annual report that Alec sent us has most of the info in it. We could write something that has data to back it up—from surveys, etc.
- Our budget is up! And we aren't asking for much, just the Americorps money.

Kassia

- Question about new section of trail; people are actively skiing and biking down the i-beam; that will be a bridge starting tomorrow.

Stonewall Meadows Management Plan

Lincoln

- We have the management plan! It's been years in the making, goes back to 2022. Alec has a link on the parks page, we just need to get the word out now. We have another public comment period starting now, until our next meeting—January 20—we should solicit comments through the Parks Commission email, maybe? Send your comments directly to us? Have a chunk of next meeting allocated for public comment for people who want to offer comments at the meeting. And then we have January and February to discuss and adopt any changes. Lincoln will email the list serve tomorrow with the link so they can read it. This is the home stretch.
- Alec: should we do a press release about it? Yes. Alec will do that.

- Lincoln: there's a table of the outreach process, we could maybe include that so people will see what's been happening until now. This is the process, this is where we're at and we'd love to hear from you.
- Jim: question about dog policy. Will it be the standard city policy? That requires leashing or voice control except on streets or sidewalks which is leashed. Kassia thought it was everywhere but except for Hubbard Park as the one exception. Alec: Hubbard Park is allowed to make its own canine code of conduct, but elsewhere it's the city. Per the city ordinance, it's leash or voice control for Stonewall Meadows and also for the Elks Club property.
- Kassia: what motivated your question, Jim? We've gotten some people saying they love that it's off leash and others disagreeing.
- Jim: I have a list of about 16 people in the neighborhood and I tell them if I'm coming to the meeting and I had someone submit that question. They did attend one of the walks so they had an opportunity ask at that time. I know other people in the neighborhood have strong feelings about off-leash.
- Jessa: So they want some more clarity? What is the status
- Lincoln: currently the MP does not specify what the dog policy is. So we should add that ordinance language to the Management Plan and see what kind of feedback we get. We should add that in somewhere.
- Emily: we could add it to the Existing Conditions section to say that people currently walk their dogs on and off leash
- Alec: city says dogs must not "run at large" which means off leash and without leash, out of voice control, out of sight. Temporary sign for the Country Club Rd. property reframes the city ordinance for the public—Alec will send us that summary to insert in the management plan.

Sign Charette

- Alec: Keir and I can kick off where signs are in our parks, where we're heading with our signage. My big picture goal is to keep it high level, and have Parks Commission answer the following questions:
 - 1) where do we want signage?
 - 2) What are the most important things we want to communicate?
 - 3) Is there a specific aesthetic or vibe we want?
- Signage styles are a bit disparate right now. Jeff's unofficial take was to have fewer signs, it's better to get lost than have signs, and we've tiptoed into having more signs. And the dog thing led to a lot more signs. And maybe it's now time to discuss how to streamline. We've also talked to MAMBA about the most effective mountain bike signs. It makes sense to put together something that is recognizable, people know immediately it's a Montpelier Parks sign.
- We have 6x6 wooden signs, permanent dog signs, specific use signs (bike signs, winter signs, canine code of conduct signs)
- We have 3 central locations for signs: (1) kiosks, (2) trail signs (the wooden posts), and (3) more ad-hoc ones, e.g. intersection ahead, dog signs. And we want to eliminate as many ad-hoc ones as possible. We want to get everything either in a kiosk or on a post if possible.
- Kiosks is also where we have all the rules, put in agenda stuff and events, etc.

- Question for Kip and Arthur: ideas for how to do better mountain bike signs?
- We'd like to work toward a better aesthetic so park signs are recognizable. It would be nice to have a woodcut aesthetic—not all on wood, but similar style. And each park could eventually have its own logo. It would be easy to create dog and bike signs that would have a similar aesthetic. That's where we'd like to head.
- Wooden posts would eventually have all the information you need—so dog info, bike info is all listed down a single post
- Jessa: fewer words, more images is better, all listed down the same post would be good. The more visual, the easier it will be for people to get
- Kassia: people might not stop to read or be able to read a lot of text. So the River Conservancy signs have section with more text but also symbols with clear indications about what is and isn't allowed. It's good to be as visual as possible, that makes it more accessible
- Green circles mean yes; red circles mean no; need to always include an x in addition to colors to make sure people will be able to read it even if they don't see colors.
- Alec: Only the permanent names/landmarks should be burned/carved. The other rules about dogs, bikes, etc. will be small signs attached to the posts.
- Kassia: we could fill kiosks with more permanent signage so that's less maintenance. What about events info? Alec: we usually have had 3-4 sheets filling the space, and 3 of those are events/calendar related.
- Jessa: we can try to make as much visual as possible.
- Arthur: the less you have to pull up a map, the better you're doing. For mountain biking we're always trying to make sure people know how to use the terrain as it should be used. More maps would be good—you are here type signs that show people where they are when they're approaching trail intersections. Like at Keane Mountain in Northfield, they have full maps on posts at regular spots so people can navigate without their phone. It would be good to have some clarity in North Branch about where extraction points are—in other trail systems like Kingdom Trails, Driving Range, etc. there are signs saying that this is a location where you can be extracted. That's important info for first responders so if that could be added that would be good.
- Alec: I have plans to meet with Liam to create a map for first responders that shares where they can get to with ambulance, stretcher, whatever it is. We looked at the Kingdom Trails map for emergency responders which is really great.
- Kassia: an action plan in the Management Plan is to create a large map for Seven Fireplaces. And also at the Tower. Those are two internal hubs without maps.
- Jessa: has there been a conscious decision not to do more “you are here” maps?
- Alec: there has not been a conscious decision. How big are the maps in Northfield?
- Arthur: they're just 8.5x11 so you have to walk up to it and look, so they're inobtrusive visually.
- Lincoln: did we talk about doing a QR code, adventure maps?
- Alec: we phased that out in favor of a georeferenced PDF. That was less expensive because in every update we had to update GIS and printed stuff.
- Lincoln: maybe we can incorporate QR codes into the park, for intersections
- Jessa: maybe add the bit about being able to see yourself on the map that has the QR code for “view this map online”

- Kip: Kingdom Trails has 12 numbers for intersections that was meant for emergency extraction but those maps are out of date. They have maps that are zoomed in on the area where you are, which shows more. And they all have you are here notes.
- Alec: there are 4 kiosks in North Branch.
- Kip: MAMBA looked at doing maps at every intersection but then it got above 30 and it seemed too much
- Arthur: we tried to prioritize use patterns, multi-use versus just bikes. And we wanted to be really clear at entrances—there are 3 or 4 defined entrances to North Branch which is nice and there's no change in dog usage so it's less complicated than Hubbard Park
- Alec: would intersection ahead signs be helpful?
- Arthur: there are a couple of intersections where we do want to make sure people know what's going on—Swallowtail and Bob and further up Bob; also crossing on Tanager. The places where there's potential for higher speed bikes to intersect with walkers or runners.
- Kassia: there's one where bikes fly out onto the river trail—that's Tanager.
- Arthur: that's easier for bikers because they can see down from above, but walkers can't see—so having signs up above so bikers watch their speed as they're coming down
- Kip: those should be 8.5x11 so people can see them as they go by, bigger than the small ones we currently have
- Alec: what about trail courtesy triangles? Do we want those on trail posts or somewhere else? In kiosks? Right now we have them all over the trails.
- Kip: I don't like the seasonality of them, like snowshoes versus ski conflict. We put up some new signs up telling people where they can fat bike, but some of those probably need a no biker sign. No bikes signs on Swallowtail seemed to work in summer
- Arthur: having them at the entrance to the system is similar to canine code of conduct, setting an expectation right up front. There's some value in having that kind of messaging when you have trail uses changing—like a bike trail dumping into a multi-use, that's a helpful spot to remind people how they need to yield to all users of the trail. But making it ever-green is the trick so the burden of managing trails isn't so significant. Where it's really helpful is to set expectations up front, and if the experience is changing, then making sure users are aware that a change is about to happen
- Arthur: If Swallowtail is the only trail that's seasonally changing, if all other trails are open to biking year round, then we shouldn't make a policy based on that one trail.
- Kassia: what about trails that are closed? We don't currently have signage for them. That place where Salamander bridge was closed, that's been closed for 3 years and there's someone who comes and moves the trees and keeps doing that, every day. How bout an "area closed for revegetation" sign? Or people who cut corners because they don't feel like walking to the junction
- Keir: we have some of those signs already. Some people will just keep cutting through regardless.
- Kassia: we need some of these for the new trail because it's replacing so many social trails
- Alec: that's the third center of our signs—the ad-hocs. We have these signs, and dog signs, interpretive signs, etc.

- Kassia: like the dog signs, they might be good to have on a temporary basis. The old trail needs to disappear, and until that happens we might need signs. Hopefully after a year it won't even look like a trail any more.
- Lincoln: temporary signs could also fit in with the same sign aesthetic
- Jessa: this is something we want to minimize, still—we want to avoid creep. There should be a good staff or Parks Commission reason for any decision to do ad-hoc or temporary signs
- Alec: if the signs all had a similar aesthetic and were made out of a more durable material, maybe they'd be a little less offensive. Less plastic, etc.
- Jessa: yes, the number of them, the plastic, there's kind of an annoyance in the park so that could be why people are taking them down.
- Kassia: I think people stopped moving the dog signs around, when we first put them up people were just picking them up and carrying them around
- Alec: my goal wasn't to have a pile of work coming out of this, but to just get a better idea of where to head. This was a good discussion. Maybe could be good to have a signage discussion on a meeting in a few months to see how it's going
- **Summary of signage discussion:** Kassia: there are many messages at primary entryways, which means kiosks, and maximizing visual information as much as possible. And then minimizing signage throughout the park with small icons to indicate use changes. And then new maps at seven fireplaces and tower saying "you are here"

Ongoing projects updates

- Alec: Bridge decking happening tomorrow!
- EAB: Joanne Garton wants to come to January meeting and share the community outreach materials she has with us. Or February meeting could also work
- Alec: we were invited to apply for the RTP full grant! Our contract is going to come in a little under from Timber and Stone, so my goal for that is to continue the Multi-Use trail with MYCC
- Pump Track: Arthur: we're still trying to get a designer, we may have missed the window for that so we're still looking

Next meeting: January 20

- Agenda items:
 - o Stonewall Meadows Management Plan public comment period for 45 minutes. That should be first
 - o Alec will present reroute on Sparrow Farm Trail
 - o Joanne Garton will present on EAB public outreach
 - o Staff update

Any amendments to management plan need to be done for adoption at following meeting in February