

Vermont Trails & Greenways Council
QUARTERLY MEETING
January 11, 2007

10:30 AM – 2:30 PM
VT Agency of Agriculture Conference Room*
Montpelier, VT

MEETING MINUTES

1) Committee Reports

a. *Operations*

Beth Ann Finlay explained that the letters placing the VT&GC on town warning were sent out January 9th to all towns. Included with the letter was an invoice for \$30.00 for membership dues to the council. It will be interesting to see what type of response the council gets from these letters.

The committee has also been working on the definition of the Vermont Trail System in an effort to satisfy concerns voiced by Commissioner Woods in the past. A draft of this will be sent around via e-mail for comment before it is presented to the Commissioner at the end of the month. The definition has not been updated since the origination of the council back in 1994. (*See discussion under "Other" below*)

Trevor from Vermont League of Cities and Towns suggested that if we were going to send out letters on town warning in the future it should be done the week after Thanksgiving as this was the time period when most towns were working on the budget for the upcoming year. Some towns have discretionary funds to work with while others do not.

There was also a great deal of discussion regarding the definition of the Vermont Trail System. This has been an on-going issue for some time now.

b. *Government Relations- (Members-Kevin Russell, Todd Sheinfeld, Gray Stevens, Red Goodman, Ben Rose, Steve McLeod/Stanley, Virginia Lancaster, Trevor Lashua)*

Kevin Russell discussed the importance of the ancient roads issue and how more funding is needed in order for the towns to get going on the identification/mapping process. He also noted that he was glad to see Trevor Lashua from the Vermont League of Cities and Towns at this meeting, and invited him to sit on the Government Relations Committee. His experience and knowledge with politics would be a great asset.

Trevor went on to explain that there was \$368,000 worth of requests for funding on the ancient roads issue and only the \$100,000 to grant. It appears that many towns may not work on this issue due to lack of manpower, time, funding or all of the above. More funding is necessary, however the question remains, where will this additional funding come from? The budget adjustment act may be one possibility. Time is also another resource. If the dates could be pushed back this may allow for other funding mechanisms to present themselves, which would allow the towns the funding sources they need to complete the work. The Vermont League of Cities and Towns has a great deal of information for towns and/or individuals available on their website

Kevin would like to work on understanding how non-motorized recreation trail projects are funded in Vermont. He noted that motorized recreation groups were partially funded through registration fees, whereas non-motorized forms of recreation are often times under funded and based more on the backs of the volunteers. He would like to see how non-motorized could come up with a funding source such as registration or user fees.

Todd Sheinfeld noted that much of the money derived from the gas tax is used on non- motorized recreation.

Amy Bell spoke up and stated that this issue was something that needed a great deal of time at some other meeting.

Gray Stevens said that the legislature would be pinched for money this year so possibilities to any additional funding or new programs would be very dim; however we need to start working on this issue to at least get the ball rolling.

Kevin Russell would like the council to know that the chair position for the Government Relations Committee is up for grabs if anyone is interested.

Beth Ann Finlay feels that the council needs to continue working on the ancient roads issue. This is something that needs to be done soon and is at least one issue that affects all groups.

Todd Sheinfeld asked if the Government Affairs Committee could hold Internet meetings in order to make it easier on everyone.

Luke explained that it was up to the Committees to meet when they felt it was necessary, and however they felt was necessary.

Gray Stevens discussed the Fish and Wildlife Access areas ruling regarding commercial use of these areas. At the current time commercial use is not allowed at these access areas. Gray has personally been involved in the attempt to get the statutes written to allow use of these areas by small commercial operations such as guiding services and the like. The Fish and Wildlife board has been approached and the results were not favorable so other options are being pursued at this point.

Gray has also been involved in the ongoing issue over the legality of release forms. Gray is currently trying to incorporate wording into one of the fitting agricultural bills in the legislature this session. The wording being proposed will provide some legal backing behind release forms.

Luke asked Gray to compile a list of key committee members that could be contacted and asked to support this bill.

Alexis Nowalk briefly discussed the legislation that VAST plans to introduce to the legislature this year regarding the Use Value Appraisal program. The intent of this bill is to provide incentives to landowners (*who have their property enrolled in the Use value Appraisal Program through the State of Vermont*) to allow recreation on their land by providing them with more of a tax break for every use permitted on their property. It will be a tiered system. VAST will keep the Trails and Greenways Council up to date on this issue as it progresses.

c. *Public Affairs- (Members-Alexis Nowalk, Jennifer Lamphere, Red Goodman, Sherry Winnie, Virginia Lancaster)*

Paul Moffat reported that a chair for this committee is needed. Paul also reported on the Governors Council on Recreation held at the Lake Morey Inn and Resort. 150 people attended this year. Paul is looking for any ideas for speakers and/or subjects for next year.

Dan Hale said that he attended this year and felt that it would be a more interesting conference if it wasn't so park and playground oriented.

Alexis reported on the website. She and Sherry have worked on changes that need to be made, however they cannot make the changes. Sherry explained that an IT employee in ANR needs to assist in making changes and unfortunately there is little support from IT staff for FPR at the current time. Many council members spoke up and stated that an out of date website was worth less than no website at all.

Virginia Lancaster spoke up and offered the assistance of her daughter who is a Webmaster. She does a great deal of volunteer work. Sherry said this would be great, but the person updating the site has to use a FP&R computer and work through their firewall.

Red Goodman asked why the council couldn't set up a site separate from the FP&R site. These sites are easy to get, affordable and council members could make changes as necessary. These sites are available from as little as \$10 to \$120 per year.

Sherry made a motion and Alexis seconded to recommend that the Public Affairs Committee be charged with investigating the feasibility of the Vermont Trails and Greenways Council hosting their own website separate from the FP&R site. There will be a \$200 spending cap per year on spending to host the site. Motion Carried

It was also suggested that the old site be disabled.

Beth Ann felt that more funding and more staffing in FP&R would be helpful since most issues seem to somehow revolve around staffing or funding in FP&R. This initiated a great deal of discussion amongst the council.

Dan Hale will write a recommendation on what needs to take place regarding no official Recreation Division in Vermont. In his recommendation he will recognize problems and some suggested solutions to these problems, as well as a comprehensive list of individuals and personnel we need to involve in this process. We need quantified results. Dan will e-mail all the members of the council to get input/feedback for his recommendation.

2) Other Reports

a. *Ancient Roads Update*

A few council members including Todd Sheinfeld and Luke attended the Ancient Roads Workshop put on by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns. It raised even more questions than it answered. Amy Bell explained that this workshop was geared towards municipalities more than it was recreation groups, so there certainly was a tilt to the information in the workshop. This may have been confusing to attendees not involved in municipal business.

b. *Bike and Pedestrian Policy Plan*

Amy Bell brought the council up to speed on the Bike and Pedestrian plan that the Agency has been working on. Consultants were hired and are currently working on the plan. Public meetings were held and much of the plan will be based on the input from these meetings. This will be a policy plan that helps the agency better understand what they are doing right, what they are doing wrong and what direction they need to head in the future. There is even performance measures built into the plan. Three public hearings are planned once the policy plan is unveiled. The turnout at public meetings is expected to be great, and comments on the policy plan will be accepted until February 5th. Written comments can be sent to Scott Bascom, or to Amy who will forward them to Scott.

Todd Sheinfeld inquired about a similar type of plan or module for motorized recreation in the future. Amy explained that this was more of a transportation-based item.

c. *Vermont Recreation Trails Program Update*

Sherry Winnie noted that the deadline for Recreation Trails Grant applications has been extended until 4:30 P.M. Tuesday January 16th. There will be personnel on hand to accept the grant applications. The ranking and selection process will take place the end of February. There are 5 ranking committee members. Currently the one seat that is open on the committee needs to be filled by a member of a federal or state agency. Historically it has been someone from AOT. Sherry read a letter of intent from Susan Clark, Transportation Planning Coordinator for AOT who has been nominated to fill this position.

Todd Sheinfeld wanted to ensure that the person nominated had a diverse recreational background. She definitely has the professional qualifications. Other council members stated the fact that there are strict criteria and guidelines that must be followed during the review process.

After some discussion Virginia Lancaster made a motion and Amy Bell seconded to recommend Susan Clark to sit on the ranking committee. Motion carried.

After the motion there was some discussion that applications from Windham and Addison County may be favored due to Susan's direct ties to these areas' planning commissions through her personal job duties.

Sherry handed out worksheets describing the funding mechanisms for the Recreational Trails Fund. After going over the worksheets Sherry asked if the council could make recommendations on the set aside amounts for the mini grants. This change would be for this next year's program allocation. Sherry went on to explain that the department generally funds approximately 20 grants out of 35-55 applications received. There needs to be a balance between the large grants and the mini grants. Once again a great deal of discussion ensued.

The end result of the discussion was a motion by Beth Ann Finlay and seconded by Amy Bell to recommend to the commissioner of FP&R that the set aside amount for mini-grants be increased from the \$3,000.00 that is currently in the pot to \$7,000.00. The cap of \$500.00 will remain the same. If the additional funds are not used they can be rolled back into the pot for the larger grants. Motion Carried. Sherry will relay the recommendation to the commissioner.

Todd Sheinfeld inquired about the monies available through the RTP, and how VAST is the only motorized use currently allowed on state lands. Todd commented that VAST is the only group eligible to receive the 30% motorized RTP funds for projects on state lands. How is this fair? A great deal of discussion on this issue took place.

d. Others

Amy Bell has had a couple of calls from various Environmental Boards regarding Act 250 permitting on projects involving recreational trails in one way or another. They wanted to know if the trail systems involved in these projects were considered to be a part of the Vermont Trail System. Dan Hale spoke up and mentioned a similar situation that he ran into while working with an Environmental Board on an Act 250 permit for VASA. When it comes to Act 250 it does matter if your trail system is recognized as part of the Vermont State Trail System. In Dan's case, if you are part of the Vermont Trail System the 10-acre clause only affect the trail tread width. If you are not part of the Vermont Trail System the 10-acre clause encompasses the entire parcel of land you are working on. This has drastic impacts on the necessity of an Act 250 permit for a particular project.

Amy Bell said she would follow up with the people she has dealt with from the Environmental Board to find out some more information to report back to the council.

3) Other Business

None

4) Set next meeting date/time/location

Next meeting will be March 15, TBA

5) Roundtable

None

Meeting Adjourned 2:35 P.M.