

Minutes

Hogback Preservation Commission

Marlboro, Vermont

The July 14, 2014 Regular Meeting of the Hogback Preservation Commission was called to order at 5:03 p.m. at the Marlboro Town Office by Hal Himmelstein, Chair.

Members Present: Christine Colella, Bob Engel, Hal Himmelstein, Ed Metcalfe, Mike Purcell, and Jim Tober.

Members Absent: Lauren MacArthur.

Also Attending: Bob Anderson, President HMCA.

The agenda was reviewed.

The minutes of the May 12, 2014 Regular Meeting were accepted as distributed.

Reports

Chair's Report

The Endowment Fund is currently valued at approximately \$126,500 (\$4,500 in a money market account and \$122,000 in a one-year Certificate of Deposit). Disbursements for MES day stipends have been made, and a \$100 contribution to Audubon Vermont's annual "Birdathon" has been approved. This contribution recognizes Audubon's Steve Hagenbuch, who has been a major resource in preparing a detailed assessment of the Conservation Area property in conjunction with HMCA's Early Successional Habitat project.

HMCA Report

HMCA is exploring the preparation of additional interpretive signage to further enhance visitors' understanding of the natural systems that comprise the Conservation Area. These signs will be placed at strategic locations along the trail system. The signs developed and installed by the Southern Vermont Natural History Museum last year have proved to be a valuable addition to the Conservation Area's educational initiatives.

The Jason Saltman memorial plaque is ready to be installed at the overlook to the vernal pool off White's Loop. HMCA's trail crew has judiciously cleared the overlook area and will install the plaque within the week. \$500 in contributions for the plaque and perhaps a rustic bench at the overlook have been received by HMCA to date—a gratifying tribute to Jason. A public "unveiling" event will be held later this summer.

A lengthy discussion ensued regarding balancing visitation to the site and protection of the nearby wetland. Christine suggested that we emphasize that visitors should listen to the sounds of the area and that quiet visitation was consistent with the intent of the plaque and the thrust of Jason's life.

Southern Vermont Natural History Museum Report

Ed informed us that the Museum had received a grant for more interpretive signs in the Conservation Area.

Ed asked the Commission to begin thinking about a new placement for the Conservation Area informational kiosk now behind the Alpenglo building, noting that it is hard to plow around the kiosk where it is presently located on his property causing the kiosk to be difficult to access in the winter season. He noted that Lotus Graphics has recently done some good work for the Museum and could likely produce a handsome, professional graphic face for a new kiosk. He will explore this.

Ed informed the Commission that the Museum is filled to capacity and that moving the collection and exhibits to a larger venue might have to occur. Two potential locations are being explored. He also reported that the Skyline Restaurant will likely reopen in the spring of 2015.

Old Business

None.

New Business

How can we let people know about the condition of the Conservation Area trails? Traffic on muddy, wet trails can quickly degrade them. Mike Purcell knows Shannon King, a Vermont trail enthusiast who manages a website (trailhub.org) that posts trail conditions and other news from individuals affiliated with participating trail systems. We discussed whether we wanted to become part of what might amount to an advertisement of the Hogback Mountain Conservation Area that could potentially result in a substantial growth in recreational users in what is, foremost, a conservation area. Christine cautioned that excessive oversight and regulation sometimes were counterproductive; if we don't have a problem, why legislate for one? The Commission agreed to keep open the possibility of joining trailhub.org in the future, and asked if HMCA was willing to investigate developing and adding an active "trail conditions" section to its website (www.hogbackvt.org), HMCA's president Bob Anderson responded positively.

Do we want to locate and more carefully map biologically significant aspects of the Conservation Area property? These might include delicate areas, areas containing uncommon organisms or being rare in and of themselves, superb examples of otherwise more ordinary species assemblages, areas that connect to large, "wild" areas adjacent to the property, or just visually appealing features like rock faces or ancient trees? A lengthy

discussion made clear that this was not a trivial undertaking and that it might not be a good idea to direct large numbers of people to very sensitive areas. The sense of the Commission was that a well-conceived “biological map” was desirable from a policy-making perspective. Suggestions for how to best proceed included the possibility of recruiting a conservation biology, land management, or natural areas Master of Science degree student to take on the mapping project as a component of the requirements for the degree. Bob Engel will try to craft a statement that might be circulated to the several schools offering such graduate degrees within commuting distance. Bob Anderson suggested that offering a reasonable stipend could enhance the desirability of the project from the student’s perspective. The commissioners agreed to consider including a line item for such a stipend in the Conservation Area’s 2015 budget.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:25 p.m.

The next HPC Regular Meeting will be Monday, September 8, 2014 at 5:00 p.m. in the Marlboro Town Office.

Respectfully submitted,

Bob Engel
Secretary pro tempore