

Regular Meeting of the Hogback Management Plan Update Committee
7:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 1, 2024
Town Office, Marlboro, Vermont and via Zoom

Minutes

Abbreviations used:

HMCA = Hogback Mountain Conservation Association

SB = Selectboard

The meeting was called to order at 7:33 pm.

Present:

- in person – Diana Todd
- via Zoom – committee members: Amanda Whiting, Pieter Van Loon, Eric Slayton; others: Laurel Copeland (HMCA President), Nancy Anderson (HMCA Treasurer)

1. Preliminaries

- a. choose a secretary to take minutes – Eric Slayton
- b. choose a Zoom host – Amanda Whiting
- c. start Zoom recording

2. Approve minutes of previous meeting (Apr 17, 2024). Minutes approved as submitted.

3. Discuss Hogback funding options.

- a. Diana presented a summary of anticipated long term needs, the history of funding at Hogback, and some options for two different funding approaches, i.e. raising funds as needed on a project-by-project basis or gradually building up a fund in advance that can be tapped when the need arises. See attachment.
- b. Summary of discussion.
 - i. No one approach will fit all situations. Whatever we recommend in the Management Plan will ultimately have to be tweaked in implementation to best fit the situation at the time.
 - ii. Raising funds on a project-by-project basis seemed the most promising approach to those present.
 1. The biggest drawback to this approach is that it takes time, often several years.
 2. The current Management Plan says HMCA is responsible for drafting grant proposals. It seems reasonable to keep this. Some grant organizations require that the Town be the requester/recipient, while others only give grants to non-profits. Regardless of whom the formal submitter will be, the HMCA should ordinarily take responsibility for drafting the proposal.
 3. Grants often require the recipient to provide matching funds. Often the required match is around 20-25% and often volunteer labor can count towards the match.
 4. Raising funds via a public appeal requires not only great enthusiasm from the fund-raisers, but also that the project be appealing. Raising funds to tear down a building would likely not be as successful as raising funds to build a wheelchair-accessible trail.

5. Funds could be raised as part of the town budget request. Apparently this could be done two ways. The item could be included in the annual budget proposed by the SB. Or it could be voted on as a separate article.
- iii. Building up a fund in advance.
 1. Apparently a Hogback-related fund has been set up to hold \$1,000 per year of the lease money coming in from the \$13K annual National Grid lease. The \$1,000 is being set aside to pay for maintenance of the Tower Trail to ensure it is accessible by National Grid vehicles.
 2. We can ask the SB whether the rest of the lease monies can also be set aside for use on Hogback needs.
 3. The hope is that forestry management projects undertaken to improve forest health and resiliency, or to improve wildlife habitat or other goals, will generate sufficient income to pay for themselves. Some may generate a very modest surplus. We can ask the SB whether this surplus can be set aside for use in other Hogback projects.
 4. Would the townspeople be willing to have a regular line item in the budget every year in order to support a fund for Hogback projects? For example, a rough estimate is that including \$10K in the yearly town budget would cost an average of \$15 per household.
 - iv. How would emergencies be dealt with if there is no fund set up in advance? Examples of other emergencies in the past were mentioned, where the town sought a loan for the urgent need and figured out how to pay it back later (FEMA funds? grants? line item in the next year's budget?)
 - v. Is harvesting trees a viable source of funds? No. Pieter said it is not feasible to plan a harvest at Hogback solely to generate income, for multiple reasons, including standards of responsible forestry, the need to meet the multiple purposes of the conservation easement, and the emotional and recreational value of the property to the townspeople.
 - vi. Diana was directed to meet with the SB as scheduled on May 9 and present them with these thoughts.
4. All present agreed to adjourn the meeting without tackling any additional agenda items. The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Hogback funding mechanisms
notes in preparation for May 1 2024 HMPUC meeting

- the need
 - set aside the problem of immediate needs for now (First Aid Building) – figure out long term plans first
 - within the next 5, 10, 20, 50 years, big ticket projects will include:
 - safety concerns – may not be a problem now, but will be eventually
 - Benedict Cottage – demolish or renovate
 - ski bridge – repair as part of trail system or demolish
 - Quonset Hut
 - The Castle
 - minor ski area huts
 - lift towers and cables
 - contractual obligation
 - maintain Tower Trail access for trucks per lease with National Grid
 - forest health
 - professional help with invasive plants
 - forest resilience/habitat improvement
 - improvements for public access
 - a wheelchair-accessible trail
 - one-acre parking lot
 - others?
- History
 - HMCA original intent was that creating the conservation area wouldn't impose a financial burden on town taxpayers, other than the loss of the property tax payments by that parcel
 - Not clear if early HMCA ever realized the magnitude of costs regarding the buildings/structures
 - Existing endowment would not have been big enough to tackle projects we are now facing
 - Endowment is constrained in what funds can be used for
- Funding philosophies
 - Raise funds project-by-project as the need arises
 - Build a fund in advance that can be tapped as the need arises
 - Other?
- Raise funds project-by-project
 - biggest drawback – years-long delay in implementation between identifying the need and raising the funds; what if an emergency situation arises?
 - possible sources of funds
 - grants
 - current Management Plan says HMCA is responsible for seeking grants for projects (not HPC or the town, see page 21, Administration Management Structure)
 - many/most grants require matching funds – where would those come from?
 - fund raising from the public – who would do this? HMCA?

- line item in the next Town budget
 - other?
- Build a fund in advance
 - biggest drawback – it will take time to build up enough to tackle big projects, fund might get eaten up by small projects before the big ones become necessary
 - Can a restricted fund be established within the town’s financial management structure?
 - possible sources of funds:
 - payments from National Grid lease (these have been going into the General Fund)
 - net proceeds (if any) from forestry projects as currently envisioned (forest health projects, not designed for generating income)
 - regular modest taxpayer funded line item - \$10K per year? (average about \$15 per household)
 - ask HMCA to contribute annually
 - timber harvest to raise funds
 - other?