NOTES
Underhill Conservation Commission
June 9th, 2014
Underhill Town Hall

Present: Trevor Squirrell (chair), Barbara Greene, Karen McKnight, Pat Lamphere, Nancy McRae, Carol Butler, Merianne O'Grady, Jeff Moulton, Anne Mehlich, Betsy Beck, Kevin Gibson, Marcy Gibson, and Pat Sabalis.

(**Note:** Each individual present was given an agenda and a copy of the current Underhill Trail Ordinance. A sign-in sheet was also passed around the table.)

Opening Remarks: Trevor Squirrell reviewed the discussion, which occurred at the April 29th Selectboard Meeting, regarding the current Town of Underhill Trail Ordinance (2010) . During this meeting, an initial conversation around the status of this Ordinance was begun, with input from the audience, specifically addressing the Town of Underhill's Cranebrook Trail.

The Underhill Conservation Commission offered to host further meetings on this subject, in order to ascertain opinions of interested parties, such as landowners / residents abutting the Crane Brook Trail. Tonight's meeting was the first one organized by the UCC.

Primary goal: to discuss how to provide access to both landowners/residents as well as those wanting to use the Cranebrook Trail for recreational purposes. Concerns expressed at the Selectboard meeting, as well as those not yet raised, were encouraged. Trevor emphasized that the UCC is not involved in formulating any plan, nor voting on what should be included in any revised Trail Ordinance. He also reiterated that the purpose of this meeting is solely to hear what those present feel / think. The resulting points of view will then be shared with the Underhill Selectboard.

Cranebrook Trail Ordinance:
Open Discussion with public. It was clarified that this Ordinance refers only to the Cranebrook Trail, since the Town of Underhill does not possess other trails on Town-owned land.

It was emphasized that the current Ordinance has not been enforced since legal proceedings around the Cranebrook Trail began. Selectboard has indicated that these proceedings have now been resolved and that it is time to clarify the 2010 Trails Ordinance. However, there was a difference of opinion expressed as to whether litigation involving access via the Trail was actually settled by the Vermont Supreme Court.

The question was raised whether the operation of motor vehicles on the Trail without a permit is basically not a good idea, for several reasons - vehicular use would tear up the trail and surrounding habitat, unlimited access allows for unauthorized activities (dumping, partying) to occur both on Town and private-property lands.

Reportedly, much of the traffic observed on the Trail seems to be young kids in trucks / 4-wheelers. It was agreed that the Trail gives access to adjacent private property, where dumping and disruptive gatherings have been occurring for quite some time. A key component to protecting the trail and surrounding Class II habitat from environmental degradation is education of the public. It was suggested that signs be posted clearly delineating trail & town land from private property as well as listing proper trail etiquette..

It was speculated that the current Selectboard might be considering some kind of permanent barrier at each end as a way to control and monitor use by motorized vehicles.. It was also pointed out that strong feelings have been expressed among some local people that the trail should be closed all year round. In the past, the town closed the trail between Dec 1st and May 1st, with a removable boulder-barrier at Town Garage end, to limit use to X-country skiing /snow-shoeing. The concern was immediately raised that if a permanent barrier were in place, how would landowners/residents gain access when needed? One proposal has been to put gates at both ends, with keys available to landowners when needed. If the town were to utilize a sign-out sheet so that keys would have to be obtained from Town Clerk during normal business hours, this would negatively impact landowners who needed access, as well as if medical emergencies should arise on / near the trail.

The consensus of the landowners present was that currently the Trail is not even passable to foot traffic. Parts of the trail are not safe because of flowing water and hazardous footing. Much work needs to be done to make trail useable, and much money would be involved to do so. One landowner suggested that gravel on the trail could be used to alleviate the mud and decrease water flow. Other ideas were footbridges, stone paths and a culvert. However, the Town of Underhill has has made it clear that it is not willing to improve or maintain the trail. It was put forward that other entities, such as the UCC, environmental, and other groups, could be enlisted for this purpose.

It was observed by one UCC member that not much consensus had been reached at this meeting. The major question seems to be how to resolve the tension between unlimited access and concern about environmental degradation by motor vehicle use. One landowner expressed frustration that such a small thruway (approximately 2000 feet or 1/3 mile from New Rd to Fuller Rd) has caused so much trouble and inconvenience for involved parties, as well as ongoing antagonism between neighbors.

Recommendations to Selectboard: In summary, the following issues /recommendations were expressed during this meeting which will be communicated to the Selectboard by the UCC.

1) Access to land for agricultural purposes.
2) Safety issues around presence of party-goers and 'mudboggers' in motorized vehicles.
3) Conservation goals in terms of protecting the delicate nature of the surrounding habitat (wetlands, uplands, etc.).
4) Concern regarding landowner/resident safety.
5) Ability of landowners to have access to their property as needed. The inconvenience of having

to obtain permission to use the trail and /or obtain key(s) to possible gates from Town of Underhill.

6) Education of public regarding the trail, especially to inform those wanting access without permission / using trail and surrounding properties in unauthorized ways.

7) Access to trail for recreational purposes.

8) Increased involvement by more of the adjacent landowners, as well as other local residents / those wanting recreational access.

9) Response by local law-enforcement authorities in terms of unauthorized behaviors/activities (dumping, carousing, underage drinking, etc.).

10) Improvement of current conditions and ongoing maintenance of trail; which parties will initiate work and/or be responsible for financial outlay.

11) Possible approaches to traversing the brook when and where water impedes trail access.

Next steps: The above recommendations, and summary of the discussion, will be presented to the Underhill Town Selectboard. UCC has offered to facilitate any additional meetings regarding the Underhill Trail Ordinance and the Cranebrook Trail.

Notices will be posted on the Town of Underhill website, other local formats (such as FPF, TTO, local newsletters, etc.) so that more individuals will be aware of such meetings.

Those present will be notified directly as to the date and time of the next meeting.

New Business: No new business was presented.
Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Merianne O'Grady, UCC member, 6/11/14 **DRAFT**

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