



Town of Warner

Mink Hills Recreation Study Committee

APPROVED - Meeting Minutes

March 22, 2021, 7:00 PM

No physical location for this meeting; it was conducted via Zoom.

The meeting was opened by Clyde Carson at 7:00pm.

Present: Clyde Carson (Selectmen's Representative): 1 other person in the house, Craig Tufts (Regional Planning Commission): alone, David Minton: alone, Andy Duncan: alone, Sarah Allen: alone, Jason Mutschler: alone, Rebecca Courser: 1 other person in the house, Peter Bates: 1 other person in the house, Nancy Martin (arrived about 7:20pm)

Covid-19 Preamble

I am declaring that an emergency exists and I am invoking the provisions of RSA 91-A:2, III (b). Federal, state, and local officials have determined that gatherings of 10 or more people pose a substantial risk to our community in its continuing efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19. In concurring with their determination, I also find that this meeting is imperative to the continued operation of Town of Warner government and services, which are vital to public safety and confidence during this emergency. As such, this meeting will be conducted without a quorum of this body physically present in the same location.

At this time, I also welcome members of the public accessing this meeting remotely. Even though this meeting is being conducted in a unique manner under unusual circumstances, the usual rules of conduct and decorum apply. Any person found to be disrupting this meeting will be asked to cease the disruption. Should the disruptive behavior continue thereafter, that person will be removed from this meeting.

Please note that all votes that are taken during this meeting shall be done by roll call vote.

Review of Minutes of February 8, 2021

It was moved by Rebecca Courser and seconded by Sarah Allen to approve the minutes of February 8, 2021 as circulated.

A roll call vote was taken.

Clyde, yes, Jason, yes; Rebecca, yes; Andy, yes; Sarah, yes; Craig, yes; Peter, yes; David, yes

The motion passed.

Master Plan Review – Andy Duncan

Clyde noted that Andy had gone through the Warner Master Plan to see what was in it with regards to the Mink Hills, and they would discuss what they'd like to see in a future Master Plan.

Andy believed that the themes in the master plan from 10 years ago are similar to themes today. There are no doubt new themes that have come up over this timeframe that are missing and would be good to include in a future plan.

The preservation of open space in Warner was a top goal in a survey taken from the citizens of the town. There was also interest in trail systems and marking. The Economic Development chapter mentions the Mink Hills and that they draw visitors to the town, providing some economic impacts. A lot of mention of Class VI roads and scenic roads was included in the plan. Andy said there was a long section about encouraging Class A trails. Un-fragmented lands, ecological services and habitat are listed as important things for the town. Land conservation in the Mink Hills was identified as one of six conservation areas that should be focused on. A majority of those responding to the survey were in favor of spending town money to protect open spaces.

Nancy Martin said 35% of the town is conserved, but she wasn't sure what the percentage is as far as the Minks goes. Andy said that according to the plan, as of 2008, 31% of the Mink Hills in Warner was preserved, representing 4,652 acres.

Andy said the end of the plan provides recommendations. One was to identify Class VI Roads and paths and paths around open water bodies, etc. that would help create a greenway trail network. The town's Selectmen were identified as the implementing body to do this. Clyde said that he doesn't believe anything has been done in this regard and that this was something that would need to go to Town Meeting. Andy said that they needed to determine if they wanted to promote the trails and roads in the Minks to everyone, or if they should be reserved for those who live here. This appears to be a point of contention between people who live near the Minks.

Nancy said that she has seen evidence of people building on property off of Class VI roads, which is illegal. They are people from out of town and are ignoring the laws. There are currently two specific "squatters" that have put up camps and permanent housing, have electricity, etc. She will be coming to the Selectmen and the Town Administrator with photos and a complaint. Other members of the committee said there are more than just these two. Andy said this wasn't anything that came up in the previous Master Plan as an issue, but it seems to be an issue now. Craig said that he believed this type of housing was **not** permitted as of 2010.

Andy said that other recommendations are to educate people about the Minks and trails, and identify the trails that could be comprised into a greenway network.

It was obvious that the majority of those who took the survey about the town were interested in protecting the open spaces and natural resources in the town.

Rebecca said that as they further explore the subjects surrounding the Mink Hills, further recommendations could be suggested.

Dave wondered if any of the recommendations have been addressed since 2008. Nancy Martin said the Conservation Commission has been very active working with land trusts but not so much in the Mink Hills but other parts of town.

Clyde said that changes to the Master Plan over the years have come in pieces. They haven't done a complete re-do. Craig said that the Regional Planning Commission helps towns do this and also "rolling" updates, not doing it all at once. Nancy asked Craig if he could help Warner with updating some of their chapters. Craig said this would be up to the Town. There are several ways to update a plan, piece by piece. Clyde asked if the town could create a new chapter for the Master Plan that is about the Mink Hills. Craig said he believed this would be fine. They could also create a Master Plan just for the Mink Hills. Sarah felt this was premature to think about at this point. They still need to figure out their priorities and how to express them. There was discussion on how to include the Minks into the Master Plan, whether it was in other parts of the document or a stand-alone document.

Sarah said that the term "Greenway Network" seemed to be bigger than what they are talking about. Is this what they really want to do? Clyde said that there are nearby greenway networks and it was thought that perhaps some of Warner's trails could connect to those. Sarah said the goals seems different between creating trails and connecting trails. Andy felt that Warner was a bit behind other nearby towns with regards to their publicizing of their trails. There are many trails in the town but they don't have very good maps or information about them on their website.

Rebecca said a trail bandit from Henniker has been cutting trees without permission. Some trails have been cut and blazed and are posted on the internet. Jason said he has seen these as well. This person was found and fined in another town. He is now active in the Chandler-Mink Reservation. Clyde wondered if they, as a committee, should go out and look at some of these areas. Rebecca said that there was talk of this earlier; there are a few spots that the group may want to visit and see the condition of the roads, etc. It was thought that this should happen around the last half of April. Saturday the 17th at 10am was a date and time that seemed to work for everyone. The meeting/walk would be advertised publically. The Henniker Conservation Commission will be invited.

Rebecca said she was doing a Mink Hills History program on April 28th via Zoom. It would be promoted by the Warner Historical Society.

Nancy said April 12th is when Jim Ohler from Trails for Wildlife and People would do a Zoom presentation.

Brett is a property owner in the Minks (Hoyt Lane) and Rebecca asked him what he has seen on his property. Brett said he has a legal camp there and has been a landowner for 25 years. He has seen and participated in a couple of Mink Hills projects and surveys. He and his family enjoy the land and what is there now. Road access is always an issue but he doesn't know how much they will be able to keep all the roads to an extent. His road was the Henniker Highway long ago. His neighbors have been generous. He said the ATV club has always been good to him and has kept the forest clean, the access open, and have picked up after themselves.

There was discussion of the Conservation Lands Map. Craig said he could provide a map and the group could review all the data and make adjustments as necessary.

The next meeting would be held April 12, 2021 at 7:00pm via Zoom.

With no other business, Clyde closed the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 8:42pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary

Town of Warner