



Town of Warner

Mink Hills Recreation Study Committee

DRAFT - Meeting Minutes

September 20, 2021, 7:00 PM

The meeting was held at the Warner Town Hall and one member participated via Zoom as noted below.

The meeting was opened by Clyde Carson at 7:04pm.

Present in person: Clyde Carson (Selectman's Representative), Sarah Allen, Nancy Martin, Andy Duncan, Rebecca Courser, Craig Tufts (Central NH Regional Planning Commission), Christine Frost, Warner Selectperson

Others Present: Tom Dustin, Daniel Parker

Present via Zoom: Jason Mutschler

Absent: Dave Minton

Chair Carson said the committee had discussed finding more information about Class A trails. Tom Dustin is the Coordinator of the Wintastic and Monadnock coalition. He said that in the past, he has had experience working with these kinds of roads/trails. Tom shared a story of an area in his town that had turned into a dumping ground for trash and other debris near a pond. The Chesterfield Conservation Commission was able to clean up the area. The next problem was how to get rid of the traffic going down the road so that the area would stay clean. The commission went to their town to ask them to convert the road from a Class VI road to a Class A trail. This was successful. The Selectmen agreed to let the conservation commission gate both ends of the trail. One gate came down, and they had to install a stronger one. Access has to be possible to the landowners. Tom said that a Class VI road cannot be gated.

Tom said the state statutes are easy to find with regards to establishing Class VI roads to Class A trails. The Selectmen can then determine how to care for or prohibit travel on the trail. Funds to care for the trail come from the Conservation Commission's budget. Because it is a road, there aren't as many issues with overgrowth as with traditional hiking trails. When needed, volunteers with chain saws are not hard to find.

Sarah asked if the town had had any enforcement issues with the trail since designating it as such. Tom said they held a meeting of interested parties including Fish & Game, Monadnock Conservancy and one of the landowners regarding ATV use. He suggested to cut down on ATV use, establishing Class VI roads as Class A trails and putting serious gates at each end is successful. This helps prohibit ATVs from accessing the road/trails. In his town, they used their Conservation Fund to purchase the gates. Tom noted that grants are also available to purchase things like gates for this purpose. It can also be useful to negotiate with an ATV club to designate certain roads for them to ride on, and ask them to “police” other ATV riders who go off these designated trails. He also suggested making the hiking trails not compatible for ATVs.

Nancy asked if Tom felt any pushback from the public when he went to Town Meeting to change the road designation. Tom said yes, but really only from ATV riders. The key is to get the word out to voters to come support the issue. There wasn't pushback from the landowners. Tom noted that the vote to change the designation was not close and passed without any issues.

Tom said his conservation commission had been holding hikes through the years and had collected an extensive list of emails. They used this list to educate people on the idea of designating the road as a Class A trail.

When asked, Tom said that mountain bikes are permitted. Motorized bikes are not.

Nancy asked about Class B trails as opposed to Class A trails. Tom said Class B trails are more restrictive; access doesn't have to be given to the landowners. He didn't know why anyone would want one of these trails.

Tom left the meeting at 7:40pm.

Andy said the benefit of making a certain Class VI road in the Minks into a Class A trail has only one property owner, so the chances of there being issues is less. There are legal issues when considering building lots on Class V or VI roads. Andy added that Class A trails have a lot more municipal control than Class VI roads.

Rebecca said that roads need to be accessible for trail grooming and also for emergency vehicles should a brush fire break out in the woods.

Nancy said she understood that conservation funds could only be used to conserve land. The use of the money for gates or maintaining trails is subject to interpretation. Craig said he has seen some towns use funds to maintain trails. Rebecca thinks that in the past, this has been discussed and suggested looking at past minutes to find out what the funds can be used for.

Andy said the book “A Hard Road to Travel” illustrates how property loss can be experienced if the owner had planned to build on the property that abuts a Class VI road. A Class A trail cannot be built on.

There was discussion about having a more complete picture of where they would like to go with regards to converting Class VI roads to Class A trails. There are bound to be questions that come up from others. Nancy said if Sarah was to work with DES on how to locate trails away from endangered species, how would she do this? Sarah said there are six locations to avoid. Nancy said this information would be helpful to share if people have these questions. It was added that an overall mission statement about the Mink Hills area could be shared. Nancy said the Master Plan has a recommendation to create a trail network in that area. Rebecca said the

Mink Hills is important for wildlife and plant life. The big picture doesn't have to be a recreational "mecca" but rather they can pick and choose what they want it to look like. They have to be very careful with their decision-making. It can be seen just from Covid times, the increase in trail usage, parking and trash problems, and the lack of porta-potties. These aren't problems they want to invite to the Minks. They have collected a lot of data over the year but they don't want to rush these decisions. The hard work is ahead; having the discussion and making some long-term, significant decisions.

Andy thought they should start making an outline of recommendations to focus on. It was suggested to get an easel and start writing things out at the next meeting.

It was noted a public hearing must be held before Town Meeting with any proposals about the area. A warrant article has to be submitted in January.

Andy said they should think about how their plans fit in with the Chandler Reservation and he thought that was important as the reservation is Town land. Nancy said there are trails already on the Chandler Reservation; perhaps the plan could be to educate people about this recreation opportunity.

Members were advised to review the information in the dropbox. The next meeting would be held on Monday, October 25, 2021 at 7:00pm.

The meeting adjourned at 8:50pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary

Town of Warner