Freeport Conservation Commission

Minutes for February 21, 2023

6:30pm – Freeport Community Center

Members in Attendance: Margaret Gerber, Ben Shepard, Ryan Burke, John Stroud, Catherine Carroll, Anna Cudmore

Members not in Attendance: Matt McLaughlin

Others in Attendance:

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| **Name** | **Town of Residence** |
| Joanna Benoit | Freeport |
| Sean Hale | Freeport |
| Joanne Libby | Freeport |
| John Lowe | Freeport |
| Walter Libby | Freeport |
| Alan Pimentel | Freeport |
| Deede Montgomery | Freeport |
| Derek Lovitch | Durham |
| Rick Hendee | Freeport |
| Jake Daniele | Freeport |
| Alison McDougal | Freeport |
| Barbara Guffin | Freeport |
| Edward Brainard | Freeport |
| Florence Lusk | Freeport |
| Melissa Gurney | Freeport |
| Carrie Kinne, Freeport Conservation Trust | North Yarmouth |
| Jay Espy | Freeport |
| Linda Nelson | Freeport |
| Lyn Ballou | Freeport |
| Ray Kusche | Freeport |
| Dan Walker | Freeport |
| Margaret Kimball | Freeport |
| Taylor Johnson | Freeport |
| Alex Abbott | Freeport |
| Bob Moore | Freeport |
| Jennifer Melvith | Freeport |
| Tom Driscoll | New Gloucester |
| John Albright | Freeport |
| Chalmers Hardenrergh | Freeport |
| Catherine Fisher | Freeport |
| Bob Stevens | Freeport |
| Brenda Laverdiere | Freeport |
| Jennifer Pope | Freeport |
| Charlotte Pease | Freeport |
| John Pease | Freeport |
| Bradley Hayward | Freeport |
| Katherine Hege | Freeport |
| Lisa Kelley | Freeport |
| Stephanie Lilhelly | Freeport |
| Sarah Haggerty | Freeport |
| Mandana MacPherson | Freeport |
| Christopher Hoffmann | Freeport |
| Katrina Van Dusen | Freeport |

1. Approve minutes from January meeting
   1. John Stroud made a motion to approve the minutes
   2. Ryan Burke made a second
   3. January minutes were unanimously
2. Property updates
   1. Ben Shepard made a $500 motion for Florida Lake materials
      1. These materials would be used to manage flooding issues at Florida Lake, which include gravel and bridging to make the orange loop trail accessible
      2. Anna Cudmore made a second for the materials
      3. Conservation Commission members voting for the motion:
         1. Anna Cudmore
         2. Ryan Burke
         3. Ben Shepard
         4. Margaret Gerber
         5. John Stroud
      4. Conservation Commission members voting against the motion:
         1. Catherine Carroll
   2. $1500 motion made by Margaret Gerber for signage and bridging materials for Hedgehog Mountain
      1. Catherine Carroll seconded motion
      2. Motion approved unanimously
3. Hedgehog Management plan discussion
   1. Discussion commenced about the NEMBA and Greater Freeport Chamber of Commerce proposal for about six (6) miles of mountain bike trails for Hedgehog Mountain
   2. Ryan Burke explained background of the proposal going back to 2021
      1. The last time the Hedgehog Mountain Management Plan was updated in 2004
      2. A new Draft Management Plan was worked on by Margaret Gerber throughout 2022
      3. The Conservation Commission unanimously approved the Draft Plan on December 13, 2022
      4. The Town Council reviewed the Draft Plan on January 17, 2023
         1. The Town Council sent the Draft Plan back to the Conservation Commission for further review and discussion before going back to the Town Council for review on February 28, 2023
   3. Public Comment
      1. Jack Montgomery
         1. Lives in Freeport
         2. Believes the Draft Plan is correct
         3. Asked the Town of Freeport for all documentation about the NEMBA and Chamber of Commerce mountain bike trail proposal for Hedgehog Mountain
         4. Jack Montgomery also talked to Stu Johnson and Tawni Whitney about the proposal
         5. Did research about what the trails would look like and how they would be constructed
         6. Jack Montgomery submitted to the Conservation Commission a letter about the mountain bike trail proposal, as well as some pictures from Maine Trail Builders Facebook page about trails they have constructed
         7. Jack Montgomery visited Blackstrap Preserve in Falmouth, which has mountain bike trails constructed in a similar manner to what is proposed for Hedgehog Mountain
         8. Emphasized that decisions made about Hedgehog Mountain will have long term impacts to the property
      2. Bob Moore
         1. Was on the Conservation Commission in 2004 when the last management plan for Hedgehog was developed
         2. Appreciates the current work on the Draft Plan
         3. In 2004, Bob Moore recalls presenting the plan to the Town Council and NEMBA wanting mountain bike access to the summit of Hedgehog Mountain
         4. Bob Moore discussed a preserve versus a park
            1. Preserve: A place to find peace
            2. Park: More activity and more impact on the property
         5. Bob Moore encourages the current Draft Plan to be finalized as is to preserve Hedgehog Mountain without mountain bike access to the summit
      3. Derek Lovitch
         1. Works at Freeport Wild Bird Supply
         2. Hedgehog Mountain has an exemplary forest
         3. Invasive species have not taken hold at Hedgehog Mountain
         4. The forest at Hedgehog Mountain used to be more common in the area, and therefore it harbors a lot of species of birds
         5. Derek Lovitch is concerned about root damage and establishment of invasive species at Hedgehog if the mountain bike trails are built
         6. Derek Lovitch believes the Draft Plan should stand as it
      4. Kathleen Sullivan
         1. Serves on Freeport CAN
         2. Believes the mountain bike proposal for Hedgehog Mountain is tied to economic development in Freeport
         3. Kathleen Sullivan asked what is the price for economic growth on the environment?
         4. Kathleen Sullivan referenced how for over 10,000 years Native Americans lived in balance with the land
            1. Kathleen Sullivan told a story of how Native Americans warned European settlers against overfishing salmon and cod
         5. Believes the Town caring more about the environment will attract more people to Freeport
      5. Stu Johnson
         1. One of the owners of Maine Trail Builders
         2. Freeport Economic Development Council and NEMBA approached Maine Trail Builders about the idea of building mountain trails at Hedgehog Mountain
            1. Trails would be for beginner and intermediate mountain bike builders
         3. Appreciates the content of the Draft Plan, but disagrees with not allowing mountain bikes on the summit
         4. Stu Johnson explained that trails built at Blackstrap Mountain were some of the first trails that were built by Maine Trail Builders
            1. Lessons learned were taken from that work
         5. When mountain bike trails are built, some trees are selectively taken
         6. When berms are built for banked corners, the backside of the berms, will generally see plants taking hold
         7. Stu Johnson believes the mountain bike trails as proposed could be scaled back and still be a desirable place for mountain bikers to go
         8. Stu Johnson believes that if mountain bikes are not allowed on the summit, it will be less desirable for people to mountain bike at Hedgehog, and mountain bikers could still trespass onto the summit
      6. Florence Lusk
         1. Believes Stu Johnson made Florence Lusk’s argument that if mountain bikers are allowed at Hedgehog Mountain, people will ride on the summit if they are allowed there or not
         2. Florence Lusk stated the summit of Hedgehog is very small and compact
         3. The summit is a special place
         4. The mountain bikes would negatively impact the summit and how special it is
      7. Jennifer Melville
         1. Supportive of the Draft Plan as is
         2. Has helped towns and land trusts protect land
         3. Pointed out that Hedgehog is an existing conservation property, and that allowing the mountain bike trails would negatively alter Hedgehog Mountain by having mountain biking be the dominant activity at Hedgehog Mountain, which would negatively impact other existing uses
      8. Alan Pimentel
         1. Is new to Freeport, but is not new to mountain biking
         2. Over the past few years has raced in over 300 mountain bike races
         3. Alan Pimentel is a trial runner and snowshoer
         4. Alan Pimentel is not supportive of mountain bike trails at Hedgehog Mountain
         5. Alan Pimentel is concerned that hikers and dog walkers will be run off the trails by mountain bikers
         6. Alan Pimentel was hit by a car and is recovering from this
            1. Alan Pimentel still bikes but comes into conflict with cars
      9. Alex Abbott
         1. Alex Abbott is a 35-year mountain biker, Nordic skier and trail runner
         2. Alex Abbott is a stream restoration professional
         3. Businesses like Alex Abbott’s that are not retail are often not part of the Chamber of Commerce
         4. The headwaters of Merrill Brook are in Hedgehog Mountain
            1. Alex Abbott helped replace a restrictive culvert on Hunter Road that crosses over Merrill Brook
         5. Believes the proposed trail system for mountain bikers at Hedgehog will be dense and have negative impacts on the property
      10. John Lowe
          1. Wants to keep Hedgehog Mountain as is to protect the property
          2. John Lowe agrees with the Draft Plan as is
          3. John called for increased investment at Hedgehog Mountain to maintain the property
      11. Shawn Hale
          1. Lives on Hunter Road
          2. Supports the Draft Plan as is
          3. Disappointed the Town Council at their last meeting about Hedgehog Mountain tabled voting on the Draft Plan to send it back to the Conservation Commission
          4. Believes there is currently good balance at Hedgehog Mountain, which the mountain bike trial proposal would not adhere to
      12. Margaret Kimball
          1. Believes current culture forgets the idea of sanctuary, to be in nature
          2. Regularly uses Hedgehog Mountain with her dog, and she talks to the trees
          3. Supports the Draft Plan as is
      13. John Pease
          1. Has friends that are mountain bikers
          2. Was invited by friends to a Facebook Group about mountain biking
          3. Sees a lot of mountain bike trails in development locally and believes Freeport doesn’t need mountain bike trails
      14. Brad Hewitt
          1. Likes Hedgehog Mountain as is
          2. A lot of history at Hedgehog Mountain
      15. Ed Brainard
          1. Lives near Hedgehog Mountain and is a regular user
          2. People need to ask what will be lost if mountain bike trails are developed at the summit at Hedgehog Mountain
          3. Believes Hedgehog Mountain should be maintained as is
      16. Bob Stevens
          1. Is supportive of the Draft Plan as is
          2. Asked people at the Conservation Commission to stand if they support the current Draft Plan
      17. Stu Johnson
          1. Pointed out the mountain bike trails proposed for Hedgehog Mountain had shared usage in mind
          2. Identified four (4) proposed bridges to be built where some mountain bike trials cross existing hiking paths
      18. Derek Lovitch
          1. Carries out the Bradbury Raptor Mountain Research Project
          2. Counts hawks at the top of Bradbury Mountain
          3. Sees the east part of Bradbury Mountain as a mountain bike park that is unsafe to hikers
          4. Believes mountain bike trails at Bradbury haven’t brought significant economic development to Pownal
          5. At Bradbury Mountain, has observed mountain bike usage on the summit trail that is officially off limit to mountain bikes
          6. Believes more mountain bike trails at Hedgehog Mountain will hurt bird populations
   4. Ryan Burke explained that discussions have been held between the Conservation Commission, NEMBA, town council members and the Chamber of Commerce at smaller venues throughout 2022 and 2023
      1. John Stroud made a motion to add letters and emails received by Ryan Burke to the minutes of this meeting
         1. Ben Shepard seconded
         2. Motion approved unanimously
      2. Some discussions occurred about adding a new trail to Hedgehog Mountain
         1. Ben Shepard explained that a scope and budget for a new trail would need to be developed for the proposed 2023-2024 budget
         2. Margaret Gerber explained that best management plans for building new trails should be researched on the topic before considering building new trails on areas of steep slopes
         3. Stu Johnson offered up some documentation in his possession from 2004 on best management practices for trial building
         4. Catherine Carroll made a suggestion to include the documentation on the public record
   5. Jack Montgomery stated it would be helpful to have a repository for Conservation Commission documentation and documents about the mountain bike proposal
      1. Freeport Conservation Commission agendas and minutes are posted on the Town Website
   6. Catherine Carroll made a motion to send the current draft management plan back to the Town Council for consideration on February 28, 2023
      1. John Stroud made a second to the motion
      2. Anna Cudmore believes Margaret Gerber has done good work on the draft management plan
         1. Anna Cudmore believes it is ridiculous that we have continued as a town to debate putting mountain bike trails at Hedgehog Mountain after the Draft Plan was sent to the Town Council for debate in January
      3. Ben Shepard explained his viewpoint to support Catherine Carroll’s motion
         1. Ben Shepard reviewed the points that NEMBA and the Chamber of Commerce have failed to address on the Hedgehog mountain bike trail proposal
            1. One: NEMBA and the Chamber respecting the Conservation Commission’s definition of the summit
            2. Two: Constructing amenities for increased mountain bike usage at Hedgehog Mountain; including toilets, more parking and trail connectivity to the rest of town
            3. Three: Ongoing maintenance fund for Hedgehog Mountain so the cost of the upkeep for the trails doesn’t fall onto the Town
      4. Margaret Gerber pointed out that now many stakeholders have been heard from with different viewpoints about the mountain bike trail proposal at Hedgehog Mountain
         1. Margaret Gerber believes there is a desire in town to have mountain bike trails in Freeport and that as a town we need to focus on this
      5. Motion approved unanimously
4. Budget Discussion
   1. Ryan Burke to get from the Town 2023 budget actual costs incurred
   2. 2023-2024 budget proposal due to the Town by the end of February
   3. Ben Shepard has a draft budget that he can share with the Conservation Commission before the end of the month
      1. Included in the proposed budget are
         1. Maine Conservation Corps labor to build a new trail into Hidden Pond
         2. Costs for the Public Works to regrade the main trail entrance into Florida Lake and to build a parking lot at Quarry Woods
         3. Various materials
      2. Ben Shepard and Carrie Keene to talk to Adam Bliss from the Town about engineering the Quarry Woods parking lot because it needs Project Review Board approval
5. Adjourn
   1. Ben Shepard made a motion to adjourn
   2. Catherine Carroll seconded
   3. Motion approved unanimously

Next meeting: March 14, 2023