



# Winooski Valley Park District

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## **Minutes April 17, 2018 Board of Trustees Winooski Valley Park District**

The meeting began 4:35 PM April 17, 2018.

**Present:** Erin Dupuis (Winooski), David Crawford (South Burlington), Tom Malinowski (Essex), Sonja Schuyler (Jericho), Nick Warner (Executive Director), Rita Dessau (Williston) Aaron Keech (Burlington).

**Absent:** Susan Gilfillian' (Colchester), Lauren Chicote (Programs Director)

**Minutes:** Minutes of February 20, 2018 meeting were reviewed, and accepted after a correction was made.

**Public Comment Period:** Gary Carlson, cartographer, presented sample maps of Colchester Pond and Macrae Farm featuring the topography from Google Maps, superimposed onto our trail maps. The maps were very clear in both poster-size and letter-size, due to excellent resolution. He plans to meet with Nick to review the trail maps and plan for further volunteer work. It will add valuable information to our website, signage, and handouts.

**Agenda changes:** Sonja requested that prior to executive session, we add a discussion of improving publicity of WVPD's work. Board members welcomed the additional topic.

**Additional Public Comment:** Richard McGuire, Town Manager of Williston, gave a talk illustrated using Prezi software, on the history of the relationship between WVPD and the town of Williston. He expressed continued appreciation of the work WVPD does. He stated that while WVPD was organized in 1972, the town of Williston joined it in 1989, and then established its Environmental Reserve Fund in 1989, of \$60,000. Williston pays about \$32,000 yearly into WVPD via the funding formula, but does not have a WVPD park accessible from Williston. Total environmental conservation budget in Williston is \$143,000, which includes WVPD portion. The funding formula is based on combination of town population plus grand list. Grand list was originally thought to represent the wealth of a town's citizens, and therefore their proportionate ability to pay municipal tax. However, it represents the total value of properties held in the town, and therefore does not necessarily reflect individual citizens' wealth. Williston residents have been stressed by the Act 60 Education Reform bill, which increased taxes by \$.20 in one year. Mr. McGuire stated that currently, Williston pays the highest amount per person to WVPD of all 7 member towns, but he does not feel that this best reflects the citizens' proportionate ability to pay. He stated that while the town may hold many commercial properties that increase grand list value, there are also significant increased costs in municipal services to these commercial entities.

He also discussed some other county or regional organizations included in town taxes, and issues surrounding decisions about proper allocation per town. Chittenden Unit of Special

Investigation, at first attempted to base fees on the number of investigations per town, but this varied too widely each year, to be useful. The newly-formed Chittenden County Public Safety Authority might exact higher costs initially than what towns currently pay for emergency dispatch. Tri-town Sewer and the water district charge per gallon. Lake Iroquois divides the cost equally among the 4 towns. Community Justice Program is funded mainly by grants. There is also a Chittenden County tax, which is based strictly on Grand List, and is about double the WVPD payment.

Mr. McGuire and board members discussed the issue of funding WVPD in relation to the funding formula and to the absence of a WVPD owned park in the town of Williston. Although Williston voted to continue membership in WVPD in referendum this March, Nick does not feel that this ends our responsibility to improve the relationship of funding to value derived from it. Nick believes that after the town first joined the district, there may have been worry that the WVPD would set up conservation easements that would take control of the properties out of the hands of the town of Williston. WVPD actually contributed significantly to development of Five Tree Hill, but was not given ownership. Nick stated that altering the funding formula is an issue that would be a significant challenge to other towns, particularly Winooski and Burlington. He asked if segregating the commercial grand list from the private grand list might be a possible strategy. Mr. McGuire agreed that it may be more appropriate. Sonja stated the local options tax is available. Dave asked if Williston is still interested in having WVPD develop the Jacob parcel, and Mr. McGuire agreed that some interest did exist. Tom stated that he went through the board minutes, and that we have been discussing the funding formula at most meetings for the past 16-18 months. He is also asking random users of Woodside Park in Essex to identify their town of residence, and verifies that Williston residents do use it. Aaron asked Mr. McGuire why, in 1989, the town both joined WVPD and established its own conservation fund, but did not receive service from WVPD in the form of providing a park. Nick stated that there were complex reasons at Five Tree Hill, including issues surrounding mountain biking access and the VAST trail at that time.

Nick stressed that the success in the referendum did not obviate need for continued evaluation of funding and its use. If Williston agrees to allow it, the WVPD would carry out a natural resource inventory of the Jacob parcel, and then plan to build a simple access trail to begin its development as a park. WVPD may also provide some contract services for trail maintenance in Williston.

**Financial Reports:** EAHM budget update will be available later this month. Please see WVPD budget summary of April 11, 2018, generated by Mary Stuessy. After review and discussion, the budget was accepted by all.

**Increasing Public Awareness of WVPD's Work:** Nick stated that the Champlain College interns are continuing publicity, and planning to do more. Tom requested information about whether organizations working with us are also publicizing their affiliation. We will ask them to include information about us in their websites. Erin is getting involved with Girls Circle, and will support publicizing their involvement with WVPD.

**Executive Session to discuss real estate acquisition issues:** It was moved to enter executive session at 5:43 PM, in anticipation of need to discuss a real estate matters. This was seconded and passed unanimously. At 6:25 PM, the board completed the executive session.

**Next Meeting:** The board will postpone next meeting for a week, so as not to interfere with Conservation Field Day setup May 16. The board meeting will be May 22, 2018 at 4:30 PM.

**Adjournment:** It was moved, seconded, and passed to adjourn at 6:28 PM.

Respectfully prepared by,

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Rita Dessau, Secretary