



Winooski Valley Park District

Ethan Allen Homestead

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Minutes for January 5, 2021 Board of Trustees for Winooski Valley Park District

The meeting began at 4:37PM. Meeting was held via conference video call (Zoom) due to the current situation regarding the coronavirus, COVID-19. WVPD offices are closed to the public until further notice.

This meeting was rescheduled from the originally scheduled December 15, 2020 meeting.

Present via conference call: Aaron Keech (Burlington), Susan Gilfillan (Colchester), Jeffery Theis (Essex), David Crawford (South Burlington), Erin Dupuis (Winooski), John Nittler (Williston), Nick Warner (WVPD Executive Director), Lauren Chicote (WVPD Operations Manager).

Absent: Sonja Schuyler (Jericho).

Public Comment Period: No members of the public were present at the time of public comment.

Agenda Changes: No changes were made to the agenda.

Review and Approve Minutes from Previous Meetings: The minutes for the November 17th meeting were reviewed. Jeffery Theis motioned to approve the minutes, seconded by Erin Dupuis/Dave Crawford. Minutes were accepted unanimously.

Review and Approve Financial Reports: The Treasurers report for the Ethan Allen Homestead Museum was presented and reviewed by the board. The Museum continues to do well even with limited hours and tour capacity this past season due to COVID-19 limitations. Their bank accounts show enough to get them through to next season.

The financial report for WVPD for FY21 through the month of November 2020 was presented. The report shows a net income of \$181,821.09, as most member town allocations for the fiscal year had been received as of the date of the report (November 30, 2020). The only remaining member town allocations yet to be received is from the City of Winooski, and one installment payment from the Town of Jericho. The budget is on track for this time in the fiscal year, and since the report was created several year end donations had been received, along with grant reimbursements from the Burlington Forest Preschool and the City of Burlington Ventilation Mini-Grant.

2021 is scheduled to be an audit year for the Park District, however the staff has proposed to postpone the audit until next year due to the complications of office and document access, and in-person interactions with audit firm, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Dave Crawford motioned to extend the audit timeframe by one year. The motion was seconded by John Nittler and was unanimously accepted.

Discussion of Achievements in 2020: WVPD prepared a summary of the highlights and achievements from 2020 to be presented to the board – see attachment below “WVPD 2020 Achievements”. Lauren Chicote presented a power point that outlined the achievements and highlights. Despite the challenges everyone faced in 2020 and the pandemic, WVPD was able to maintain core operational functions and keep parks open and accessible even with the increase in

use and lack of seasonal maintenance crew being hired. This was a testament to the knowledge, skills, and dedication from Parks Superintendent, Tim Larned, and Projects & Programs Coordinator, Remy Crettol. The development and re-naturalization of Derway Cove was a top achievement of the year and WVPD looks forward to officially opening the park later in 2021.

This document and the accompanying power point will be available on the WVPD website.

Executive Session: Dave Crawford motioned for the board to enter executive session to discuss real estate matters, seconded by John Nittler. The board unanimously entered executive session at 5:04PM. The board left executive session at 5:47pm with a motion from Dave Crawford, seconded by John Nittler.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 5:54PM.

Next Meeting: The date for the next meeting will be February 16, 2020 at 4:30 PM via Zoom.

Meeting Minutes prepared by:

Lauren Chicote, Operations Manager



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WVPD 2020 ACHIEVEMENTS

January 2021

Submitted by Nick Warner, Lauren Chicote and Tim Larned

Reflecting on 2020, it reminds me of a maxim that helps me get through challenging times: *“Every problem presents an opportunity, every opportunity presents a problem”*. While we have witnessed a serious public health crisis, WVPD has been able to move forward with projects and priorities while welcoming hundreds of new park users to the system. In the face of potential fiscal challenges, WVPD has taken two concurrent paths: an extremely careful and conservative approach to our expenditures, the health and safety of our staff, tenants, and park users, and a very proactive approach to creative solutions to accommodate the new conditions that we are still facing on a daily basis.

Given the scale of the COVID-19 crisis, WVPD staff continues to plan for several possible fiscal outcomes based on best, most likely, and worst-case scenarios. It appears that while towns have taken a significant hit, our relative position seems to be stable this fiscal year, with support for next fiscal year’s budget as well. However, we assume nothing regarding FY22 until after the towns have finalized their budgets and have secured approval on Town Meeting Day.

Our overall approach has been to focus on being a good host to the hundreds of existing and new park users that continue to populate the WVPD system; ensure that our tenants and partners are getting the support they need to operate and survive, ensure that we are in regular contact with our member towns, continue to nurture our relationships with partner organizations, and continue work on park development and growing our park portfolio.

WVPD staff are working in four locations: Parks Superintendent, Tim Larned, occupies the main office (and conducts work in the park system daily); Lauren Chicote, Operations Manager is working remotely out of her house; Executive Director, Nick Warner, is in a temporary rental space; and Remy Crettol uses his home and WVPD office as bases of operations. Staff members have had to quarantine several times and/or alter their schedules due to the impacts of the pandemic. Despite these challenges, and the lack of seasonal help this year, the WVPD park system has remained open to the public - who have arrived in droves to escape the impacts of COVID.

Lauren Chicote has embraced her role as Operations Manager. She has taken over the bookkeeping duties (saving WVPD money) and is now deeply involved in all aspects of WVPD operations. Lauren has been working to streamline WVPD's policies and procedures, and keeping things running smoothly during the COVID era.

She has also assisted the City of Winooski in a "Safe Routes to Parks" grant application for access improvements to Memorial Park. If awarded, WVPD would be the fiscal agent for the grant, and work closely with the city on its implementation. The grant award is \$12,500 and we should know the status of application in early January. This is all part of our evolving partnership with the City as the future potential of WVPD's ownership of Memorial Park is being evaluated.

Lauren continues to represent WVPD on the Burlington Wildways Initiative, a multi-sector effort to coordinate the development of an interconnected trail system in Burlington. The Burlington Wildways Invasive Pilot project will be utilizing data collected by a consultant to inventory invasive infestation of the Intervale (Ethan Allen Homestead, Mackenzie, and Intervale Center lands) to designate test sites for various management techniques that could then be used to manage invasive plants across the intervale lands.

Lauren is also communicating with recreation directors/staff from member towns about sharing resources, such as winter scavenger hunts and tracking guides, to help people get outside this winter. She is also giving member town recreation departments permission to advertise and promote WVPD parks for outdoor recreation and use in the winter.

In early 2020, WVPD was awarded a \$4,000 Organizational Support grant from the Lake Champlain Basin Program for upgrading our computer and software systems. Lauren, with the volunteer assistance of her partner, Steve Lefebvre, purchased four new Dell laptops and accompanying monitors and keyboard set ups, and successfully migrated WVPD to Microsoft 365. This upgrade, while needed before the pandemic, has proven to be invaluable as the laptops and Microsoft 365 have allowed for more efficient remote work capabilities.

This past spring marked the first time in 34 years that WVPD was not able to hold our annual Conservation Field Day event. However, we were able to be creative with the help of our AmeriCorps Environmental Educator, Rachel Proctor, a wonderful Virtual Conservation Field Day through the online Prezi platform. Many of the organizations that provide workshops for Conservation Field Day, along with some new ones, shared online content and resources to get students outside and learning. We shared the presentation with the teachers and students who would have attended the event and were also able to share it with other schools and classrooms who we would have not been able to invite to the event due to capacity limitations.

Work Completed 2020 by Parks Superintendent Timothy Larned

2020 has been an interesting year. We were able to accomplish some major projects/repairs even though we had a reduced staff size this season. This was the first season in my nearly 20 years of working here that we were not able/decided that fielding a crew would not be possible. This left park upkeep to 2 staff members, myself and Remy Crettol. We did our best to keep the green spaces



mowed and trails cleared. We hope that 2021 will bring some return to normalcy and help us to continue to maintain our park system and to continue to make necessary upgrades.

- **March until June:** mostly remote, working from home with the Stay at Home Order with occasional trips to the office/parks to check on things. Early in the pandemic we developed a lot of new signage that needed to be installed at parks to inform users on how best to use the parks and stay safe. This information needed to be updated as things changed quickly during the early months of the pandemic. Staff spent quite a bit of time researching how other conservation organizations and our member towns were dealing with the pandemic, along with following recommendations and guidelines put out by the State. Tough questions had to be answered and strategized around:
 - o Should parks be closed?
 - o Is it our responsibility to enforce spacing and mask wearing?
 - o How much of an impact is increased mud season usage having on our trails?
 - o Can we be out maintaining our trails?

HELP KEEP THIS PARK OPEN

- **KEEP 6FT+ PHYSICAL DISTANCING**
- **KEEP PETS ON LEASH AT ALL TIMES**
- **GROUPS ONLY FROM THE SAME HOUSEHOLD**
- **NO PARKING ON ACCESS ROAD**
- **IF LOT FULL, PLEASE VISIT ANOTHER PARK**

We appreciate you doing YOUR part to keep our community safe, we rely on YOUR actions.
WVPD HOPES TO CONTINUE TO ALLOW ACCESS TO OUR PARKLANDS, BUT FAILURE TO FOLLOW THESE GUIDELINES WILL RESULT IN PARK CLOSURE.

FOR INFORMATION, QUESTIONS, OR CONCERNS:
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In the end, we were able to safely keep our parks open while conducting basic maintenance to ensure trails remained accessible and safe. The signage (pictured above) remain at WVPD parks as a reminder to park users on how to safely use our parks while enjoying being outside on the trails.

- Applications for Lake Champlain Basin Program and Vermont Recreation Trails Grants were submitted for funds to help replace the Wetlands Walk North at the Ethan Allen Homestead. Unfortunately, they were not awarded for either grant. In 2021 we are hoping to bring various partners to the table, including Burlington Wildways, to discuss/brainstorm ways to fundraise for this important feature of the Homestead, the City, and WVPD's land portfolio.



WVPD upgraded vehicle fleet:

We purchased a 2012 Ford F-350 with a Utility body for below market value through an auction from the Town of Colchester (see picture). A lift gate was installed on this truck to help with loading and unloading mower and other equipment into the bed of the truck. We received a \$1,000 safety grant from our insurance, VLCT PACIF, towards the purchase and installation of the lift gate.

The second vehicle is also an F-350 with a double cab, purchased at market value, is in good shape with relatively low miles. The two trucks replaced a 2005 Van and an older Ford F-150 truck. Both needed quite a bit of work to pass inspections. These vehicles should keep the

WVDP staff and crew safe and provide reliable transportation to and from our parks for years to come.

- **Colchester Pond House:** Kitchen windows were replaced, a new kitchen range was purchased and installed along with a new range outlet. New washer and dryer to be installed January 2021.
- **Contracted Work:** We planned to expand contracted labor before COVID reduced our staff, which resulted in less time for contracted work this season than we hoped. We still were able to complete a list of projects for the Town of Williston which brought in around \$3,800. Prior to COVID we had been working with member towns and VYCC on a pilot for a multi-community crew that WVDP would help run, which has been put on hold.
- **Grants:**
 - o REI Funding – Received \$4,000 originally earmarked to help with development of the Jacob/Kratz Parcel in Williston. This funding source changed and allowed WVDP to split the award to help cover some general operating expenses as well as keep some funds for future parcel development.
 - o Outdoor Gear Exchange – Received \$1,900 to replace a bridge at the front of the Ethan Allen Homestead. We were hoping to complete the work on the bridge this fall/early winter, however the snow and cold weather has delay us until spring.
 - o 2021 Recreation Trails Grant being prepared for submittal to replace timber frame staircases at the Riverwalk end of the Riverwalk Trail. Application is due Feb 2021.
- **Ethan Allen Homestead:** removed wall in back room of WVDP Office to increase rental opportunities in early 2020. This room ended up becoming space for the Burlington Forest Preschool to expand into a 3rd classroom on the Ethan Allen Homestead campus. The exterior trim, garage doors, and windows of the WVDP Office building were painted.
- **Restoration Projects: Derway Cove** re-naturalization planting and park development continued this summer with all buildings removed from the site. The site was graded, remaining debris was removed, and many native trees and shrubs were planted to aid in the restoration of the park. A new gate has been installed and the path has been developed. New signage will be installed by the spring, with the plan to officially open the park later in 2021.



Pictured is Parks Superintendent, Tim Larned with one of the new tree planted at Derway Cove.

- **Restoration Projects:** At **Macrae Farm Park**, WVDP and Winooski Natural Resource Conservation District staff along with volunteers participated in a riparian planting of nearly 500 stems with the Trees for Streams program.

Article from the Colchester Sun about Macrae Farm Park: [Opt Out: Take a stroll along the Winooski River at Macrae Farm Park](#)

- **New Park Updates: Wolcott Family Natural Area** entrance improvements are moving along. Progress and opening have been slowed by COVID. We have continued with trail work and hope to open the park in the spring of 2021 as soon as things are dry enough and entrance paving is complete.

Article from Colchester Sun on Wolcott Family Nature Area: [“Balancing what people need with what the landscape needs” New natural area coming soon to Colchester](#)

- **Salmon Hole and Riverwalk Trail:** replaced 40’ steel I-beam bridge essential to Riverwalk Trail. Previous bridge was damaged by a falling tree and decking needed to be replaced.

Despite the challenges 2020 presented, WVPD had a successful year and remains optimistic for the future. We are excited for our park openings in 2021 and continuing to provide high quality conservation land for public recreation and enjoyment.

