

Springfield Trails & Rural Economy Committee Meeting

Thursday, June 27, 2024

5:30 PM

Town Offices Meeting Room

Call to Order—The meeting was called to order at 5:31

Roll Call— Present were: Jim Fog (presiding), Sue White, Chuck Gregory, Barbara Schultz, Josie Hingston, Bettina McCrady and by invitation Town Manager Jeff Mobus and Parks and Recreation Director Adam Middleton.

Announcements

Sue White announced an input request by VOREC, regarding the future of outdoor recreation in Vermont. It is holding a webinar on the subject. Sue said she will record it and report.

Update from Town Manager and Parks & Recreation Director— Town Manager Jeff Mobus introduced Adam Middleton, the newly appointed Director of Parks and Recreation Department. Adam has put together an advisory committee for Parks and Recreation, a result of the Select Board indicating an interest in the department having one. Jim Fog asked about whether the Select Board had included a line in the budget for the town pool. Jeff said it had not. Bettina McCrady provided background for Adam on the creation of this committee. Jim asked if the advisory board's meetings would be public, using as an example the need to repair the town pool.

Jeff provided a summary of the recent meeting of parties involved in the Exit 7 redesign. He mentioned the possibility of continuing the Toonerville Trail with a tunnel under the Interstate. He displayed a map and indicated the areas dealing with the most likelihood of hazard to trail users under some of the alternative routes.

Invasive Plant status reporting/coordinating with Town Of Springfield—Regarding invasive plant status reporting, Barbara Schultz reported that the town has to take into account that the pesticide applicator must be state certified when the town addresses the problem of invasive plants. Jim Fog recommended that the town have its employees routinely destroy buckthorn, barberry and bittersweet plants at the moment of encounter. He mentioned two locations severely infested.

Bettina McCrady departed at 6:10 PM.

Approval of minutes of previous meetings— the minutes of the meetings of April 18 and May 16th were approved unanimously as submitted (Schultz/Gregory).

Old business

Hartness Park update— Adam Middleton reported that the work on the improvements could be done in September or October

Ski warming house and Survey Status updates— Jeff Mobus said there were no obstacles to planning at this time.

Input to the Ordinance Committee regarding proposed hunting restriction— Jeff Mobus reported the Ordinance Committee will be meeting next week and discuss the proposed ordinance. Barb Schultz provided a draft of a presentation to the Ordinance Committee (attached). Moved to present the draft to the Ordinance Board as submitted pending any proofreading corrections (White/Gregory). Passed unanimously.

Website update—The website has been updated.

New Business

Communication with YMCA regarding Meeting Waters Municipal Forest— Barbara Schultz said she will be meeting with the Executive Director of the Meeting Waters YMCA to discuss possible collaboration regarding the YMCA camp and the Municipal Forest.

ST&RE-related objectives in the updated Town Plan: Barbara noted that there is a lot of content in the new Town Plan— e.g., Meeting Waters, town trails, etc— that might deserve our attention. Jim said it was suggested by the Town Planner that there might be some liaison between the Planning Commission and this committee.

Sidewalks— Susan White asked Jeff Mobus about various spots in town where the sidewalks border on being hazardous to users.

On behalf of Bettina McCrady, Jim asked Adam Middleton if he would become more involved with the committee than were his predecessors. Adam indicated “the same rec, more parks” for his focus.

The next meeting was set for July 25th, 5:30 PM at the town offices. There was no agenda set for it.

The meeting adjourned at 7:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

chuck gregory, secretary

ATTACHMENT

ST&RE Statement Regarding Hunting in Hartness Park Summary

The ST&RE has requested that the Town of Springfield consider creation of, or amending any present, ordinance to prohibit hunting at Hartness Park. The objective of the hunting restriction would be to reduce encounters between hunters and other recreational users. These encounters pose real or perceived safety concerns, and may have a negative impact on the experience for all. Although we are not aware of any problems to date, we are also concerned about the town's liability, should an injury occur.

This request coincides with improvements to the park intended to increase use by residents and visitors. A hunting prohibition would: reduce the actual risk to all users, reassure new visitors, and reduce encounters on other properties by providing an alternative location for non-hunters to recreate.

Background Information/Discussion

Hartness Park includes three miles of trails for non-motorized use. On foot, the park is just over a half-mile from the designated downtown. Recently completed improvements include blazing, signage, and a new parking area. Another grant has been received to fund trail work later this year which will address erosion and drainage issues.

These efforts support an objective of the Town Plan to increase Hartness Park usage. We're making the request, at this time, because the intent is to publicize the park more broadly once improvements are complete. A hunting restriction would be reassuring to new users who may have limited experience in the woods or knowledge about hunting.

Although the property is 85 acres, it is not all easily accessible. About half has a slope of over 15% slope, with nearly half of that being over 30%. There is also some wetland. These limitations concentrate users in certain parts of the park, and increase the chance of encounters.

We have no concrete information, to date, on use of Hartness Park by hunters. There have been tree stands installed within the park, suggesting that the park is used by one or a handful of individuals for deer-hunting during the archery or firearm seasons. Damage to signposts documents that there has also been discharge of firearms.

Springfield is 73% forested. Other forested public lands in Springfield are open for hunting, including Meeting Waters Municipal Forest, Muckcross State Park, and the US Army Corps of Engineers North Springfield Lake property. In addition, much of the private forestland in Springfield is not posted, and many landowners are open to hunting.

A casual search of other municipal lands in Vermont is summarized in the attached table. While this search was not comprehensive, it suggests that towns tend to restrict hunting and/or firearms in parks near downtown, and allow hunting, in compliance with state law, in properties well outside of the developed areas. With firearm use specifically permitted by ordinance in the Meeting Waters (aka Bryant) Municipal Forest, a hunting restriction in Hartness Park would align Springfield with the towns listed.

To follow-up on a question that may come up, a search also indicates the VT Supreme Court, in 2006, affirmed that municipalities have the option of banning hunting on lands they own.

6/27/2024

Springfield’s existing town firearms ordinance restricts the discharge of firearms and similar weapons on properties owned by the town. However, it does not apply to Hartness Park which is in a Residential Agriculture zone. The western and southern boundaries of the park coincide with the Medium Density Residential zone boundary, putting it just outside the regulated area.

Proposed Language

At the 6/17 Selectboard meeting, it was suggested that ST&RE submit language the committee would recommend. Understanding that ordinance language is not within the committee’s expertise, one possible approach is to amend the existing ordinance regarding the discharge of firearms.

One option may be a single change to prohibit the discharge of firearms (and “similar” weapons) in the park. This would address many concerns and could be a practical approach. The amendment may read more-or-less as follows:

(b) ...This section does not apply to those areas within the town that are zoned by the zoning regulations as land reserve, residential agriculture or low density residential, except within Hartness Park;..

However, we ask that the town consider an outright ban on hunting within the park boundary. This would increase perceived safety for some users by clearly including archery season, prevent the installation of damaging tree stands, and may avoid confusion about whether the 500’ rule in the firearms ordinance applies.

The intent of the proposed language below is to:

- Include Hartness Park in the area of town which is covered by the firearms ordinance.
- State that any hunting activity will now be excluded from Hartness Park.
- Clarify that hunting will continue to be allowed in the Meeting Waters Municipal Forest.
- Correctly identify the name of Meeting Waters Municipal Forest, as stipulated in the Bryant deed.
- Address the multiple, permanent tree stands which are currently installed within the Meeting Waters forest.
*(b) This section does not apply to those areas within the town that are zoned by the zoning regulations as land reserve, residential agriculture or low density residential, except within Hartness Park; nor shall it apply to the Bryant Meeting Waters Municipal Forest.
 No hunting is allowed in Hartness Park. Hunting is allowed in the Meeting Waters Municipal Forest.
 Permanent tree stands and ground blinds are prohibited; temporary tree stands and ground blinds must be removed by the last day of hunting season.*

Examples of Vermont Municipal Forest and Park Hunting Restrictions

Town	Park	How Close is Park to Downtown?	Acres	Use	Regulations
Barre	Town Forest	Edge of town neighborhood	370	Biking, Hiking, Disc Golf	Hunting is permitted in the Town Forest in compliance with the laws of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department... Except for pedestrian use, trails will be closed from the beginning of rifle season until the end of muzzle loader season for deer. Trapping is allowed, as permitted and as directed by the Selectboard.

Bellows Falls	Minards Pond	Edge of town neighborhood	230	Water supply, hiking	It is hereby declared to be unlawful for any person or persons ... to enter upon the land adjacent to and bordering upon said pond for the purpose of fishing, swimming, camping, hunting, skating, snowmobiling, ATV riding, or cutting wood.
Bellows Falls	Village Forest	Outside of town	900	Multiple Use	Hunting allowed
Chester	Town Forest	Downtown	550	Hiking, snowmobiling	Don't bring firearms into the parks
Hartford	Town Forest	Outside of town	423	Hiking, biking, snowmobiling, hunting, forest management	The Town Forest is open in season for hunting as provided under State Regulations
Montpelier	Hubbard Park	Outside of town	>200	Recreation fields, biking shelters, woodland trails	Hunting allowed
Richmond	Town Forest	Downtown	428	Hiking, biking, snowmobiling, hunting, forest management	No discharge of weapons, at any time
Rutland	Pine Hill Park	Outside of town		Biking, Hiking Hiking	Hunting allowed subject to State regulations. Trapping prohibited. Exceptions may be granted to address concerns
Windsor	Paradise Park	Edge of town neighborhood			Discharge of firearms, bow and arrows, paintball guns or fireworks is prohibited in the park. No hunting in the park.
All city parks	325	Downtown	200		Hunting, trapping, firearms prohibited