Special Meeting of the Hogback Preservation Commission
5 p.m. Tuesday, February 4, 2025
Zoom Call Meeting Online & In Person

Minutes

Abbreviations used:
DVSJ = Deerfield Valley Stump Jumpers
HMCA = Hogback Mountain Conservation Association
HMPUC = Hogback Management Plan Update Committee
HPC = Hogback Preservation Commission
SB = Select Board
VLT = Vermont Land Trust

Present:
In person: Mike Purcell (Chair)
Via Zoom: Committee Members: Ed Metcalfe, Diana Todd; Others (both joined the meeting during item 5): Laurel Copeland (HMCA Chair), Nancy Anderson (HMCA Treasurer)

1. The meeting was called to Order at about 5:10 pm.

2. The Agenda was reviewed; no changes made.

3. Having been named to the HPC by the Select Board at their January 23, 2025 meeting, Diana Todd was welcomed as a member of HPC, filling the slot formally held by Christine Colella, who stepped down last month.

4. The Rules of Procedure were reviewed, noting that a change in language was needed in Section II, Item 6, which deals with the HPC's responsibilities in preparing budgets and overseeing funding for the conservation area. Because the town has turned over the Endowment Fund to the HMCA, the HPC no longer has any role in determining how those funds are invested or used. **Moved and unanimously approved**: To replace the existing Section II, Item 6 with the following language: *Prepare an annual budget to be approved by the Select Board, and monitor all town Hogback-related revenues and expenditures.*

5. The January 13, 2024 draft of the Hogback Mountain Conservation Area Management Plan was reviewed. Two topics were identified for further discussion and possible revision, drones and game cameras.

Drones: Ed Metcalfe raised concerns about the ban on drones, noting that only the federal government has the authority to regulate airspace, including use of airspace by drones. No other entity, public or private, can ban aircraft or drones from flying over their land. It was noted that both the National Park Service and the State of Vermont's state park system attempt to limit the use of drones over their parks by forbidding the launching, landing, and controlling of drones within their boundaries. (But people can still fly drones over the land if they operate them from outside the boundaries.) These examples are indications that limitation of drone use is commonly accepted and maybe even expected in public parks. **Moved and unanimously approved**: In the draft Management Plan's section on prohibited activities, replace the existing outright ban on drones to a ban on launching, landing, and controlling drones, using the National Park Service language as a model.

Game cameras: Ed Metcalfe raised concerns about the ban on use of game cameras, noting that they are used not only by hunters, but also by nature photographers and others. He cited two local schools that use game cameras for class projects. If privacy concerns for hikers are the main reason for the ban, Ed suggested only prohibiting their use within 150' of the trail. It was noted that when these arguments against banning game cameras had been raised by Ed in several previous reviews, including the public review session in October 2024, no one else spoke up to support allowing the use of game cameras.

Moved and unanimously approved: To approve the Jan 13, 2024 draft of the Management Plan (as amended to deal with drones as noted above), and forward it to the Select Board with a recommendation that they approve and adopt the Plan.

Action items: Diana will revise the draft Plan to incorporate the drone change and the revised Rules of Procedure, which are an Appendix to the Plan. Diana will forward the revised Plan to the HPC, HMCA, and VLT. VLT has said they would finalize their approval letter to the Select Board after the HPC approves the Plan. Mike will forward the revised and approved Plan to the Select Board via the Town Administrator (Nick Morgan) and ask to have an item added to an upcoming SB meeting to ask for their review and approval of the Plan.

6. The Deerfield Valley Stump Jumpers BBQ at the Quonset Hut, which was held on Feb 1, 2025 under a Facility Use Agreement/special use permit, was discussed. Diana attended the BBQ for about an hour. The site was well organized, with ropes preventing the sleds from entering the wetland areas. A propane grill was used to grill hot dogs and hamburgers for the participants. Trash was well collected. A small campfire was burning in a metal fire ring. The event was well attended, with many people reminiscing about when they skied at Hogback. As Diana was leaving, she saw two State Police arriving on snowmobiles, and stopped to chat with them. (DVSJ had indicated that they would invite the State Police to visit the event.)

7. The meeting was adjourned at 5:37 pm. The next meeting will be the regularly scheduled meeting in March.