

Little Big Forest Stewardship Committee

Draft Minutes - Monthly Meeting – Dec 13, 2023

Members Present: Robert Winterbottom (Chair), Tim Rowehl (Vice Chair), Geoff Jones, Milosh Bukovcan, Jaelyn Stetson, Maggie Forestall (via phone)

Members unable to attend: Terri LaRoche, Jason Kovarik, Craig Walker, Tim Healy

Public Present: None

Main agenda items and discussion:

Meeting was convened at 7:15 PM and Tim Rowehl led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Review and Approval of Minutes from Nov 10, 2023 SC meeting. Bob invited comments on the minutes from our last meeting. Tim made a motion to pass which was unanimously approved.

Update on LBF Activities following the November Meeting

Repairs, maintenance and plans for the cabin. The group applauded the work done by Tim and Milosh to repair the cabin step. Geoff shared a photo of the repaired step taken earlier in the afternoon and remarked on the peace and beauty of the Little Big Forest. The cabin clean up has also been done for the most part.

Maggie noted that the school students are planning an all-school hike in late spring – so it would be ideal to have additional maintenance and improvements done by May.

The committee considered and responded to several questions related to the LBF buildings and infrastructure raised in the section of the management plan document under preparation by Tim (see draft on google drive).

What is the intended use of the cabin? For day use or limited overnight use by the JFES students and possibly other small groups.

What would be short term priorities for maintenance and improvements? To organize regular clean up visits and small projects, to ensure the cabin is reasonably clean, useable, and safe. For water supply, the committee suggested having a dispenser for 5-gallon jugs of water. For lighting, the committee suggested use of battery-operated lamps and possibly kerosene lamps. For sanitation, the committee suggested installing a porta-potty at an accessible point on Phyllis Lane, and possibly a second one near the parking area on Shedd Hill Road. The committee also recommended installing a dry well for waste water from the cabin sink. For cooking and campfires, the committee suggested a low impact Solo type bonfire stove or firepit could be installed on a gravel pad (with organic matter dug out and removed) most likely behind the cabin. Also, the committee should check the stove pipe and clean the stove in the cabin to ensure it can be used safely. Minor repairs could also be made to the screens for the cabin.

In addition, the committee recommended establishment of a vehicle turn-around area at an appropriate site on Phyllis Lane. Beginning next spring, work days could be scheduled as needed (with CC and SC committee members, students, others) to participate in these maintenance activities and other work including marking of trails, signage, parking sites, etc.

What could be longer term priorities for the cabin and other facilities to support educational and recreational uses? To reduce reliance on a porta-potty, the committee proposes to budget for the acquisition and installation of a composting toilet, to be installed in the vicinity of the cabin. The committee also recommends further improvements for lighting and water supply in the longer term.

Geoff noted that funds are available and earmarked for infrastructure improvements and transportation in support of educational programs at the Little Big Forest. Details can be included in the updated management plan, including provisions for budgeting, financial management and disbursement of funds (Geoff and Terri to follow up with details and updated text for the management plan – see below).

Student Leader Applications to join the LBF Stewardship Committee

Maggie briefed the committee on the five applications receiving from JFES 4th and 5th graders. The committee was very pleased and impressed with the interest shown by each applicant: Rebecca Meyer, Charlotte Miller, Jaxon Leonard, Cooper Mullahy and Peyton Allain. After further discussion, the committee recommended that the applications of all five students be accepted and that they all be invited to work as a group to be involved in the stewardship of the LBF.

With guidance and support from Maggie, the five students could meet periodically (perhaps over lunch) during the school day as a JFES Stewardship Committee and work together as leaders for the engagement of JFES in the stewardship and educational uses of the LBF. The goal of their participation would be to encourage the life-long commitment of JFES students to the conservation and stewardship of the LBF and other community forests and protected areas in the town of Stoddard.

The committee warmly welcomes and encourages their regular participation (by all 5 students or the designated representatives of their group) in the monthly meetings of the LBF Stewardship Committee convened at the Town Hall. To facilitate student participation, the committee agreed to shift the time of our regular meetings and to start at 6 pm on the second Wednesday of each month – to begin on Wednesday, January 10, 2024.

To assist in welcoming these five students to the work of the LBF Stewardship Committee, the group endorsed a suggestion from Geoff that funds will be provided to Maggie for the design and production of customized hats and T-shirts for the five students.

Review of draft Education Vision Statement

The committee then reviewed the draft statement prepared by Maggie to guide and support the educational uses of the Little Big Forest by the JFES. The committee thanked Maggie for the draft and after a brief discussion, the committee approved the slightly amended text as follows:

We, the staff and students of the James Faulkner Elementary School, envision the Little Big Forest as a learning laboratory where students learn to be in relationship to themselves, each other, the natural world, and the local town community. We imagine this space as a student-centered extension of our school campus where students ask important interdisciplinary questions, participate in rigorous hands-on learning, and achieve meaningful and measurable growth in collaboration with peers, adults, and community members. We hope that educational programming at the Little Big Forest will help inspire the children of Stoddard to develop a strong sense of belonging and interconnectedness as an investment in their own wellbeing as well as the wellbeing of their community.

Updated Spreadsheets for JFES plans and priority needs to support educational activities in the LBF

Maggie also briefly commented on the ongoing additions to several spreadsheets posted on the Google drive to guide planning for educational activities in the LBF. These updates will be very helpful as the committee proceeds with revisions to the LBF management plan (see below).

Other business – update on boundary line adjustment.

Geoff informed the committee that the issues related to boundary line adjustments have been settled with the Town, so the way is now clear for marking boundaries, signage, trails, parking facilities, etc.

Revisions to the LBF Draft Mgmt. Plan

Geoff reminded the committee that the revisions and updates to the draft Management Plan are due to the US Forest Service in January 2024. Accordingly, in advance of the next committee meeting on Jan 10, all committee members are encouraged to review the draft management plan circulated by Geoff on Sept 13) and submit any suggestions to the group on the Google drive set up by Jason.

As a reminder, the updated LBF community forest management plan should include the following:

1. a description of all purchased tracts, including acreage, location, land use, forest type and vegetative cover (done and covered in draft plan)
2. Objectives for the community forest and strategies to implement those objectives (drafted – with possible revisions; see below for suggestions)
3. A description of the long-term use and management of the property (to be elaborated in keeping with results of listening sessions and work of the SC)
4. Community benefits to be achieved from the establishment of the community forest (drafted, could be updated or expanded in keeping with proposed educational uses and other management activities);
5. A description of ongoing activities that promote community involvement in the development and implementation of the Community Forest Plan; (outlined in draft plan– to be updated, expanded)
6. Plans for the utilization or demolition of existing structures and proposed needs for further improvements (briefly included in draft plan, to be updated, expanded);
7. A description of public access and the rationale for any limitations on public access, such as protection of cultural (including tangible and intangible resources) or natural resources or public health and safety concerns; (briefly discussed in draft plan, to be expanded in keeping with past and future listening sessions)
8. Maps of sufficient scale to show the location of the property (included in draft plan)....and any additional maps required to display planned management activities (to be added re. parking, kiosks, trails, other infrastructure and sites identified in updated management plan)

Note that elements for items 1 and 8 are included in the draft plan together with outlines and preliminary information related to the other points. Bob has also provided some updates related to management goals and objectives, Tim has been working on the sections related to the cabin and infrastructure, and Maggie has provided considerable inputs related to plans for educational uses (see above).

In sum, further work is needed to consolidate inputs related to:

- Management goals and objectives
- Results of listening sessions and provisions for continued public participation
- Establishment and work of the Stewardship Committee
- Access issues, permitted uses, signage
- Facilities and infrastructure
- Plans and guidance on educational uses
- Plans and guidance on recreational uses
- Funding, budgeting and financial management

Please also see notes from November 10 and other meetings convened in Sept and October.

Meeting was adjourned at 9 pm.

Next meeting at 6 pm on January 10, 2024

Minutes submitted by Bob Winterbottom - Chair