

Fairlee Town Forest Meeting  
Final Report  
November 3, 2021, Fairlee Town Offices  
Results presented to the Fairlee Select Board  
by the Upper Valley Trails Alliance

The meeting began at 6PM. Town Administrator, Tad Nunez, went over some general housekeeping for the meeting. Peter Berger, Select Board Chair, called the Special Meeting to order at 6:10 PM and introduced Russell Hirschler, UVTA Executive Director, to begin the facilitated part of the meeting.

There were approximately 40 people in attendance and an additional 33 via zoom. Russell began by thanking everyone for being there and welcoming them. He introduced the UVTA staff and laid out the general norms and expectations for the meeting.

The in person attendees were then broken out into 4 groups (dictated by colored sticky dots received when they arrived). Each UVTA staff member facilitated a small group and Town Admin, Tad Nunez facilitated the Zoom audience. All groups used the same series of questions, and the results of which are compiled below. The general consensus of the Zoom group was also captured and is included as well.

Within these groups attendees were asked to begin by stating their name and why they came to the meeting. Those results were not recorded.

Attendees were then asked to share their understanding of the current uses of the town forest, and then use sticky dots to identify their top 3 from the compiled list. The overall results are below, weighted by the number of dots.

- Hiking (31)
- Hunting/Trapping (22)
- ATV/4 Wheeling (21)
- Snow Machine (16)
- Logging/Timber Management (14)
- Wildlife Habitat/Wildlife Viewing/Birdwatching (14)
- Snowshoe (6)
- XC Ski (5)
- Education (3)
- Mountain Biking (2)
- Watershed (2)
- Photography (2)
- Other uses that did not secure votes were:
  - Dog walking
  - Carbon Storage
  - History/Archaeology
  - Dirt Bikes

- Horse Back Riding

The next question asked attendees to identify possible future uses of the forest and again asked them to identify top choices. For purposes of reporting on this question, any future uses that had already been identified as current uses were only recorded in the previous answer.

- Comprehensive Management Plans\* - Timber, Watershed, Recreation (12)
- Accessible Trails – All uses (12)
- Dedicated ATV Trails (10)
- Skills Training – Rescue, First Aid, Orienteering (10)
- Camping (8)
- Research (8)
- Improved/More sustainable Trails (7)
- Carbon Sequestration (4)
- Trap Shooting (3)
- Forest memorial to family that donated it (2)
- Other uses that did not secure votes:
  - Outdoor classrooms for local schools
  - Tourism
  - Art
  - Separated recreation trails by use

\*The groups mentioned comprehensive planning (Timber, Watershed, Recreation) for the Town Forest that would lead to a larger management plan. UVTA has seen other communities and forests be managed according to a management plan that accounts for all 3.

The groups then moved on to a question about what makes the Town Forest special. There was a lot of commonality across all of the groups and attendees. The sticky dot weighted highlights are below:

- Close to home/Accessible (16). Please note that this is not referring to accessible trails.
- Large intact parcel (16)
- Unique wetlands/waterfalls (12)
- Wildness/Nature (11)
- Trails (10)
- Buffer against development (8)
- Local use by the town (8)
- Timber management promotes wildlife (6)

The next question focused on how the Town Forest can be better for you AND the Town. Again, a lot of commonality among the answers.

- Improved trail signage/Maps/Trail Kiosks/Rules and expectations of use/Correct usage information shared with the public (35)
- Coordinated management – Timber, Water, Recreation (18)
- Keep it the same/It is good as is (13)
- Limit access to taxpayers and residents/Improvements should focus on residents (12)
- Trail quality improvements (9)
- Community Firewood for residents in need (4)
- Adequate funding/Ability to apply for grants (4)

- Get along/Harmony/Unity (3)

The remaining questions in this report are not sticky dot weighted due to the limited number of responses from each group.

Continuing, the next question asked How would you advise the Select Board to move forward with management of the Town Forest? The responses to this question illustrated the perceived dichotomy of the attendees, with answers falling into 2 general categories:

- Keep the Forest Board and Management of the Forest the same
- Change the Forest Board and Management in the following ways:
  - Independent and elected Management Body
  - Broader representation on Forest Board/More diverse interests on the Forest Board
  - Allow for public input/vote of management plans
  - Update/rewrite the Management Plan by professionals
- Other answers to this question included:
  - Create and distribute clear maps of the Town Forest and allowed uses
  - Carbon/Tourism study to assess income sources
  - Improve trails with erosion issues
  - Collaborate with other towns (Bradford, West Fairlee)
  - No increase of costs to taxpayers
  - Possible non-profit to accept donations for the Town Forest

When asked what attendees would be willing to give up, they gave the following answers:

- Camping
- Carbon storage
- Access to wetlands
- Dog walking
- Cross country skiing
- 4-wheel use during seasons when they can cause damage
- The buildout of improved access
- Trap shooting
- Accessible trails

Finally, the attendees were asked what parameters/conditions they would like to see for use of the Town Forest. The primary themes were:

- Trail Maps/Kiosks/Updated information about the Forest
- Mud season closures
- Leave no trace/trash and waste management
- Improved trail etiquette
  - Leave no trace
  - ATV Enforcement (speed, seasonal)
  - Stay on marked trails
  - Dogs on leashes

- Emergency planning/management (agency coordination for emergencies)
- Improve trail quality/Perform a trail assessment/Survey current usage
- Limit wheeled travel to residents only
- “Keep it a forest not a tree farm”

The information presented in this report is based data only taken from the in person and zoom attendees. It does not contain any recommendations at this time. UVTA staff would be happy to offer suggestions or recommendations when asked by the Select Board. In our opinion, there is enough commonality to allow for a consensus on future use of the Town Forest.

Thank you for the opportunity to assist the Select Board and the Town in the planning for the future of the Fairlee Town Forest.

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Sean Ogle, Trail Programs Director  
Randy Richardson, Development Director