

Observatory Knob: Public Input Session
4/24/24 5:30PM

Committee members: Chad Whitehead, Diane Chadderdon, Tracy Zschau, Kiko Nobusawa, David Pacun, David Brown, Joe Fox, Jonathan Rice, Tim Tierney. Public Members: c. 12-15

1. Agenda Amendments—none.
2. Meeting Welcome and Committee Introductions: Diane Chadderdon thanked members for attending and noted that public input is vital to the process; that the Observatory Knob needs to serve the public good. Committee members introduced themselves.
3. Observatory Knob Information (Chad Whitehead)
 - Town rules apply but also the conservation easement held by the VLT.
 - Summarized recent projects and how the Knob fits with connecting function and use of existing and recently created lands and trails.
4. Background/Maps/Conservation Restrictions (Tracy Zschau): see presentation slide.
 - Protect lands and make them available for public use.
 - Walking distance of 450 households and also public housing
 - Funding took 6 months to achieve
 - 5 acres donated by David Brown; half forested/half open
 - Conservation Restrictions: Intact, public, protecting property
 - Public management process: management plan can change over time with public input.
 - Management fund and grant fund (with help from Joe).
 - Question: When does interim plan expire? Answer: There is no expiration date.
5. Survey Questions and Public Input Working session:

Prior to opening up discussion, the committee provided a brief update on various activities that are ongoing, including consultation with county forester, trail assessment, ecological survey and inventory (i.e. vernal pools). Grant will fund a state of property assessment that will also help enable access for multiple constituents, and lead to a design plan.

A healthy and open discussion followed involving public members, with occasional responses from committee members. Topics discussed included:

Concern for ecological health of Knob and need for education regarding property. Diane noted potential for partnering w/ Fairbanks Museum.

Overcliff resident(s) noted concerns about people travelling to the Observatory Knob via the back way (Overcliff through Brown property): Concerns/points/questions included:

- 'Traffic and safety issues for people walking up on that side.
- Desire to make clear to public that access is on Mt Pleasant.
- Where is the best place to park?
- Keeping dogs on leash. Need clarity on this.
- David Brown noted that he sees only c. 8-10 residents ('regulars') using Overcliff. And that this represented a decrease from the past.
- People are going on private properties. Need to clarify boundaries. Access via private property goes way back.
- Future access should be from Mt Pleasant.
- Access through Brown property should go down.

Nature of the site and potential upgrades. Topics/ideas/points included:

- Preference for property to stay as it is.
- Desire to preserve views, especially of the 20 mountain challenge peaks currently visible.
- Thanks to David Brown for mailbox, and 'tone setting'.
- Keep open space; question regarding grazing, which helps to keep the land open.
- Appreciation for mowing along paths—tick issues decrease.
- Love of the site's history and old photos—Is there a way to allow people to know about the history and make that present at the site?
- Idea for Kiosk in parking place, that could include history.
- Additional trails, possibly on northern facing slope, which is lesser used.
- Committee members noted that redesign may be needed owing to steepness and erosion. Funding study will help with this. Potential for multiple trails, loops, pollinators, wild flowers, signage and risk management.
- Need for inclusivity and access but a love for the 'cliffyness' part of the current trails.
- Avoid sensitive areas. Variety of trails.
- Education: three rivers, watersheds,

Diane closed by asking those present to put their names on the Email list, requested those to please take the online survey, and mentioned that meeting minutes are posted on Town website. She reiterated that this is just the beginning of the process and that more chances will come for input. The public is welcome to attend meetings, and there may be potential for future meeting/walks on the property.

6. Meeting Closed

Note: informal discussions in small groups among town people and committee members continued beyond the formal meeting close.