

Agenda

Norwich Trails Committee and volunteers monthly meeting

7 pm, April 6, 2022

Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82651305884>¹

AGENDA

1. **Approval of agenda:** Facilitator
2. Comments from those present: Attendees

Old business

3. Memos to Selectboard: Deferred from March NTC meeting
 - a) Trails overview—Also to the Norwich Planning Commission
 - b) Burton Woods Road load limit—An alternative to reclassification as a trail

Infrastructure

4. Update from the UVTA: Ogle.
5. Posting for mud season: Reports from volunteers
 - Faughnan: Gile Mountain Trail
 - Hubbard: Blue Ribbon and Ballard Trail
 - Fiskens: Parcel 5
6. Reports on recent trail blockages and actions taken or planned: Reports from attendees
7. Trail projects for 2022: Prioritize and schedule surveys of work needed.
 - Betty Booth Trail
 - Gile Mountain treadway
 - Parcel 5 damage repair
 - Brown Schoolhouse Road wet area
 - Heyl trail routing from Bragg Hill Road
 - Powers Road drainage and treadway
 - Gile Mountain Tower
 - Schmidt Bog
 - Woody Adams parcel
8. Kiosk construction: Update from Faughnan

Financial

9. Funding needed for 2022 trail infrastructure projects and sources to apply to: Last call for April deadline
10. Women's Club grant for kiosk signage: Update from Flanders
11. NCC Trails budget: Managing expenses

Other

12. Happy Hill turnaround: Update from Layne.
13. Appalachian Trail Corridor: Communication from the USFS.
14. Trails and Paths Master Plan Committee: Discuss schedule and scope
15. Future website map formats: Plummer

¹ Log-in details, next page
Norwich Trails

16. Items for May meeting

- Trail survey reports for work schedule
- Future website map formats
- Sale of printed trail maps

17. Adjourn: Facilitator.

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82651305884>

Dial-in Information:

Meeting ID: 818 4324 1733

One tap mobile

+13126266799,,81843241733# US (Chicago)

+16465588656,,81843241733# US (New York)

Contact for assistance:

Nick Krembs 802-649-1048

Discussion Material

3. a) Trails overview—Also to the Norwich Planning Commission

DRAFT MEMORANDUM

TO: NORWICH SELECTBOARD, NORWICH PLANNING COMMISSION
FROM: NORWICH TRAILS COMMITTEE
SUBJECT: OVERVIEW OF THE NORWICH TRAILS COMMITTEE AND ITS VOLUNTEERS
DATE: APRIL X, 2022
CC: TOWN MANAGER, TOWN PLANNER

1. *Summary* – This memo summarizes the role of the Norwich Trails Committee and its volunteers and lays out the aspects of the town’s trail network that require the awareness of the selectboard to properly fund their upkeep, maintain their integrity, and provide for the public’s beneficial use. This information provides context to the annual budgetary requests of the Norwich Conservation Commission—which advocates for the town’s trail system across public and private lands.
2. *Introduction* – Norwich Trails volunteers work with landowners and cooperating organizations to maintain a network of public trails, spanning Norwich and interconnecting with neighboring communities under the direction of the Norwich Trails Committee (NTC), which meets with them on the first Wednesday of each month.

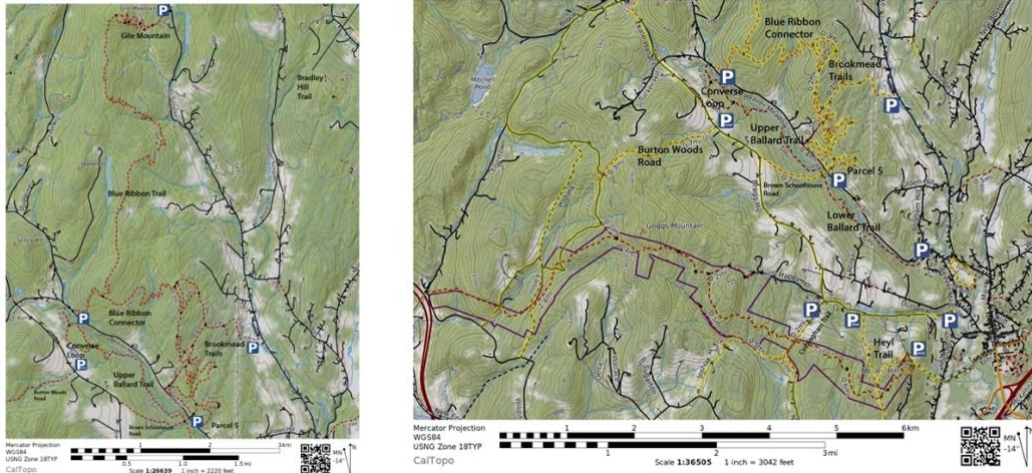
The volunteers maintain the Norwich Trails website at <https://norwichtrails.org>, which offers downloadable trail maps and news about activities, including the monthly committee meetings.



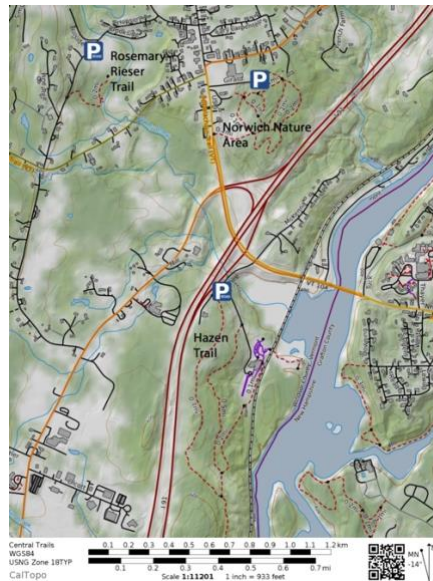
Trails volunteers after installing erosion control at the Brown Schoolhouse Bridge

3. *Trails network* – There are about 37 miles of publicly accessible trails that the Norwich Trails volunteers and their partners maintain. Two major systems are situated on either side of Beaver Meadow Road, which are served by the Parcel 5 parking lot and connected by the

new bridge over the Charles Brown Brook. Principal among these are the Gile Mountain Trail, Bill Ballard Trail, Parcel 5 Trails, and the Appalachian Trail.



Norwich trail networks: north and south of Beaver Meadow Road (left and right)



Eastern trails, near downtown

The trails cross multiple jurisdictions on land owned by:

- Town of Norwich: Gile Mountain, Blue Ribbon Trail, Schmidt Bog, Norwich Nature Area, Bradley Hill, Heyl, Cossingham, Burton Woods, Woody Adams Woods Road Trail, Powers Trail, TH 51, and other class IV road segments
- Norwich Fire district: Ballard, Parcel 5, and Blue Ribbon Connector
- Federal government: Appalachian, and Tucker
- Private landowners: portion of Ballard and Blue Ribbon, Brookmead, Hazen, King Arthur, and Rieser

Most of these trails interconnect and are enjoyed by the public as part of the amenities that make Norwich attractive to its residents.

In addition, there are many privately held and maintained trail networks in town that are not shown on the Norwich Trails website, unless requested by the landowners.

Under discussion at times, has been the possibility of a trail that would pass across private property from Huntley Meadow to the Dresden playing fields. Such a core trail would have to be assembled piecemeal with landowner cooperation.

4. *Governance* – The Norwich Trails Committee is a three-member subcommittee of the Norwich Conservation Commission (NCC). It oversees the activities of the Norwich Trails volunteers, who maintain trails in our town. The NTC reports to the Norwich selectboard and town manager through the NCC and its chair.

The NTC coordinates town-funded and grant-funded projects through the town manager, in coordination with the Finance Department. Any NTC member may be designated to coordinate individual initiatives, according to the consensus of the committee in a warned meeting.

Norwich Trails volunteers seek reimbursement of any authorized out-of-pocket expenditures that they may have, through a designated NTC member.

The NTC coordinates prospective trail work with the Upper Valley Trails Alliance (UVTA)—to which organization the town votes funds in a separate warrant article—to provide expert advice and to oversee the efforts of cadres of volunteers from local companies and youth groups that complement the efforts of Norwich Trails volunteers.

The Norwich Trails website is privately funded, as of 2022, and not subject to town governance. The volunteers, who maintain this website, are open to closer coordination with the town.

5. *Budgeting* – Much of the input into trail maintenance and infrastructure improvement is through volunteer labor. A certain amount of the effort is unplanned, owing to downed trees or storm events. Another class of effort is planned upkeep and maintenance of trail infrastructure. The unplanned activities require a baseline annual funding line for material expenses. The planned activities are subject to funding through town and grant sources. The NTC has been successful in soliciting grants for such improvements as bridge replacement, trail signage, and treadway restoration. Nonetheless, capital expenditures on town land should be supported by taxpayer funds, when necessary.

For capital projects, the NTC has applied to the Vermont Recreational Trails Program (RTP) for matching funding. Such funding was instrumental to the infrastructure improvements on Gile Mountain. Unfortunately, it was not available for the Brown Schoolhouse Bridge project because the funding committee decided that prior-year applicants would be funded, instead. The Jack and Dorothy Byrne Foundation was a generous contributor towards the bridge project.

6. *Town-owned trail infrastructure* – Each of the trails on town-owned land or rights of way has infrastructure investments that have a finite lifetime, require annual maintenance, or are vulnerable to weather extremes. Here are trail infrastructure items that may require budgeting attention in upcoming years:

- **Gile Mountain:** The trail received a substantial improvement in drainage and treadway with stone steps that were installed with the help of RTP funding. These require annual maintenance of the drainage after the leaves are down. Segments of the treadway are supported by wooden cribbing for steps and sidewall support, which have a finite life. The wooden steps on the fire tower observation platform will require replacement, sometime. The remains of the cabin have been an attractive nuisance for vandals, at times. It may require removal at some point.

As Norwich's most-visited trail, the trailhead parking lot has had insufficient capacity at times. A scoping study was budgeted for FY 2022-3 to identify a solution to this problem.

- **Ballard Trail:** This trail runs along the Charles Brown Brook and has three trailheads—at Ballard Park, at the Brown Schoolhouse Bridge, and near the intersection of Tucker Hill Road with Beaver Meadow Road. The trail crosses many tributaries to the brook, some requiring a few stepping stones to cross, others with wooden bridges, and still others with bog bridges. As of 2022, the bridges and bog bridges will be in a new 10 to 15-year replacement cycle.

Segments of the trail are vulnerable to flooding events that have necessitated importation of fill material to restore the treadway. One segment was subject to a landslide that necessitated a trail relocation up and down a steep pitch, using stone steps. Much of the soil along the trail is clay-rich and subject to progressive erosion.

The Brown Schoolhouse Bridge was completed in 2020, thanks to a town warrant article. It's constructed with concrete abutments, galvanized steel beams, a thick wooden deck, and aluminum railings, all with long life spans. The deck may require replacement sometime after 2050.

A segment of the Ballard Trail crosses the private property of a cooperating landowner. If a permanent ROW doesn't yet exist, one should be acquired to assure the continued use of this popular trail.

- **Schmidt Bog:** This bog is a town-owned 22.5-acre natural area, accessible from Upper Loveland Road. It was acquired for preservation with the advocacy of Bill Ballard, because of its habitat for lady slippers and other bog species. It features a board walk, which is visited by school groups. As of 2022, the boardwalk was to be assessed for maintenance or replacement. Lacking also are trailhead information and interpretive signage.
- **Burton Woods Road:** This class IV road passes from Bragg Hill to Podunk Road over the ridge of Griggs Mountain. At the Bragg Hill end, a beaver pond prevents passage of motorized traffic, except in winter. The segment between the pond and the ridge has been subject to severe erosion from the passage of trucks that come to the dead end and turn around. This segment is a candidate for load restrictions that permit the passage of ATVs and snow machines, but exclude trucks and forest machinery (except with a permit) to allow water bars to be constructed and maintained. Their construction might require contracted mechanical equipment.
- **Bradley Hill Road:** The upper end of the trail has, at times, been relocated onto private property because of trees falling across the right of way (ROW). The ROW is a candidate for permanent improvement of the treadway to address drainage. The northern end of the trail at Kerwin Hill Road has been subject to severe erosion that has necessitated relocation at that point.
- **Powers Trail:** This class IV road is a wet, washed-out connection that completes a loop via Kerwin Hill and Pattrell Roads. It would benefit from improved drainage to create a treadway. This construction might require contracted mechanical equipment.
- **Heyl Trail:** This town ROW roughly parallels the Appalachian Trail from the top of Elm Street to the VELCO power line; it then turns north to Bragg Hill Road along the power line ROW. A recently installed bog bridge at the Elm Street end has approximately 10-15

years of life from its installation in 2020. The trail has insufficient and ill-defined parking at both ends.

- **Woody Adams Wood Road Trail:** This trail starts where the VELCO powerline crosses Turnpike Road and parallels the powerline up to the Gile Mountain Trail. It has major drainage issues, which will require water bars, grading, and a small stream crossing.
7. *Parking*—Construction and maintenance of parking areas at trailheads are the responsibility of the Department of Public Works. The town maintains off-road parking at Ballard Park, Parcel 5, upper trailhead to the Ballard Trail, Gile Mountain, and Cossingham Road. There is ill-defined parking at turn-around locations at Happy Hill, Upper Loveland, and Bradley Hill—these areas require clear delineation of where parking is permitted in all seasons. Other trailhead locations have roadside parking (Hazen, Heyl at both ends, Burton Woods, and upper Brown Schoolhouse), where winter maintenance may not push far enough onto the shoulder to facilitate parking out of the roadway and out of the possible path of maintenance and emergency vehicles. Most Norwich trails have substantial hiking and skiing traffic in winter.



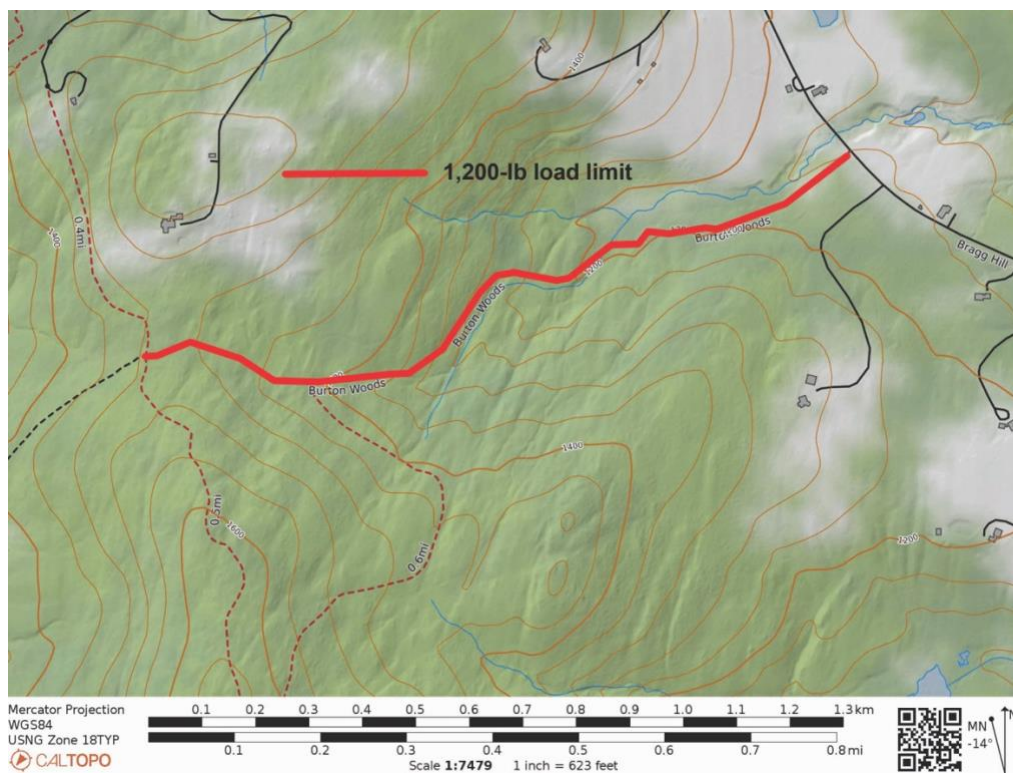
A “discovery hike” to the Happy Hill shelter on the Appalachian Trail, guided by Norwich Trails volunteers

3. b) Burton Woods Road load limit—An alternative to reclassification as a trail

DRAFT MEMORANDUM

TO: NORWICH SELECTBOARD
FROM: NORWICH TRAILS COMMITTEE
SUBJECT: REQUEST: ESTABLISH LOAD LIMITS ON BURTON WOODS ROAD
DATE: MARCH X, 2022
CC: NICK KREMBS, STEPHEN FLANDERS, LIZ BURDETTE (UVMBA CHAIRPERSON)

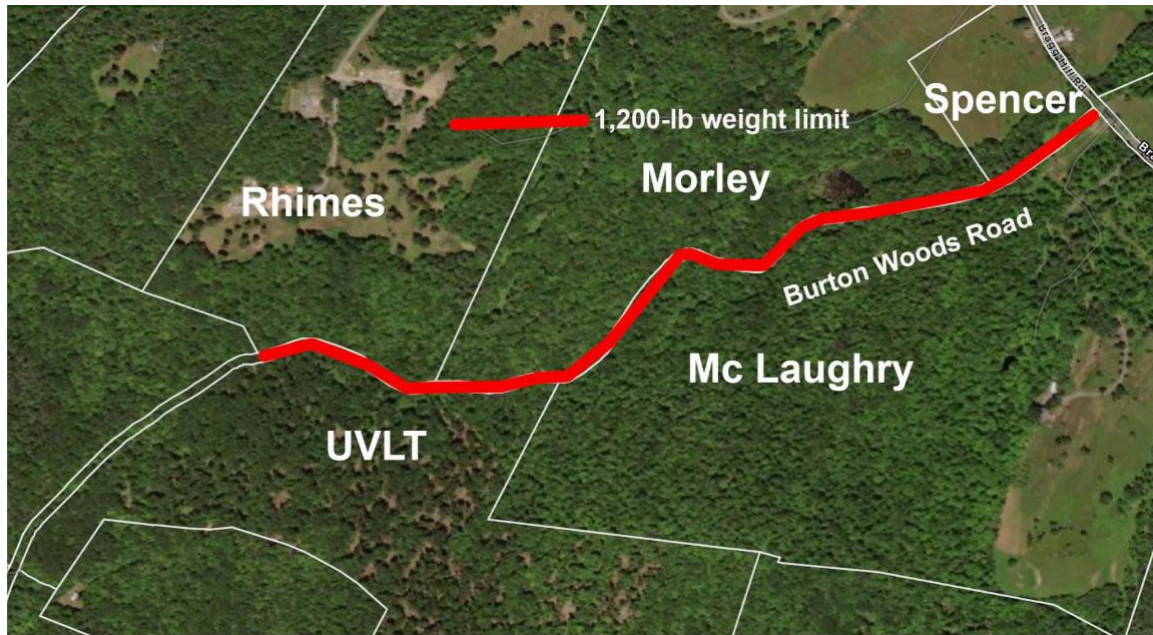
8. *Request* – The Norwich Trails Committee requests that the selectboard lower the load limits on the portion of Burton Woods Road between Bragg Hill Road and the ridge of Griggs Mountain to allow use by off-road vehicles of up to 1,200 lbs, but require a written permit for passage by heavier vehicles, contingent on repair of any damage to the drainage in the right of way. The western side of the ridge would remain open to motorized traffic, without constraint. Signage, combined with physical impediments would exclude non-conforming vehicles.



Site of proposed load limit restriction from Bragg Hill to the ridge of Griggs Mountain

9. *Justification* – The right of way (ROW) is steep and wet. Occasional recreational vehicle traffic exacerbates the erosion and prevents mitigation of damage. Lower load limits will allow implementation of sustainable erosion control measures that will greatly increase the usefulness of the trail to all trail users, whether on foot or on off-road vehicles. More details are described in the **Image Gallery**.
10. *Abutters* –There are five abutting properties to the section of ROW proposed for conversion:

- South side: Susan F. McLaughry Revokable Trust, 1093 Bragg Hill Road.
- South side, near ridge: Upper Valley Land Trust, 19 Buck Road, Hanover, NH 03755
- North side, on Bragg Hill Road: Catherine Spencer, 1141 Bragg Hill Road.
- North side, west of Spencer to the ridge: Benjamin and Christianna Morley, 1219 Bragg Hill Road.
- North side, Morley to ridge: Shonda Rhimes, Los Angeles, CA.



Parcels adjacent to proposed trail conversion

11. *Impact* –Lowering the load limits would have the following considerations:
 - The section does not connect to properties requiring motor vehicle access.
 - It is part of a variety of loops that serve cyclists and hikers.
 - The road beyond the west side of the trail serves several camps, which gain access from Tigertown Road and would be unaffected by the lowered limits.
 - It would allow sustainable erosion control measures that would benefit all users, whether on foot or on off-road vehicles.
 - Forestry operations using the ROW would be subject to a permit that could require repairing any damage to drainage structures.
12. *Statute* – [19 V.S.A. § 303](#) gives the selectboard the authority to regulate town roads. [19 V.S.A. § 304](#) grants the selectboard the power to “See that town highways and bridges are properly laid out, constructed, maintained, altered, widened, vacated, discontinued, and operated, when the safety of the public requires, in accordance with the provisions of this title.” [19 V.S.A. § 1111](#) gives towns to require permits in ROWs.
13. *VLCT Guidance* – The Vermont League of Cities and Towns [MODEL CLASS 4 HIGHWAY POLICY AND GUIDANCE](#) says, “The Selectboard shall exercise control of class 4 highways to ensure their integrity as public rights-of-way by means which may include, but are not limited to, the following:”
 - Establishment of vehicle weight limits;
 - Prohibition or restriction of use by motorized vehicles;
 - Imposition of requirements for temporary permit for heavy equipment access which may include a stipulation that any highway damaged will be repaired by or at the expense of

the user, or posting of bond or other security to guarantee that repairs are made; either or both of which may be required as a condition of any permits;

- Granting permission to pent (gate) a Town highway.

14. *Draft motion* – "... to amend § 103-13 (Page 44) of the [town code](#) to add "D. The load limit for vehicles on Burton Woods Road shall be 1,200 lbs between Bragg Hill Road and the highest point of the road. The Town Manager shall require prior written permission for vehicles over 1,200 lbs, subject to a requirement to repair any damaged caused. The Town Manager shall be authorized to place and maintain physical impediments to non-conforming vehicles."

Image Gallery

Images were shot on 20 June 2021 during semi-drought conditions.



Entry from Bragg Hill Road is narrower than a vehicle



Traffic observed was mostly mountain bikes.



Lower section is normally poorly drained.



The ROW passes through a beaver pond.



Multiple sections of ROW are wet and drain through tire ruts.



Steep, rocky sections compromise vehicle passage.



This stream crossing near the ridge is usually much wetter.



The junction at the top proposed weight-restricted road segment



The trail leading south at the junction



The trail leading north at the junction

11. NCC Trails budget: Managing expenses

- Trails 2021-2 Approved budget: \$1,290
- Trails 2022-3 Approved budget: \$2,750
Norwich Conservation Commission
2023 Proposed Budget

4.) Trails Committee	\$2,750
a.) Trailhead information kiosks (4) - \$1,200	
b.) Bridging materials (1) - \$1,200	
c.) Trailhead and trail maintenance - \$350	