

FINAL COPY  
Policy Committee Meeting Minutes  
City of Auburn JLUS  
For Area Surrounding  
Mount Apatite Recreation Area &  
Maine Army National Guard Training Facility  
**Held at AUBURN PUBLIC LIBRARY**  
On January 9, 2013  
from 4-6 p.m.

**Introductions:**

Kat Beaudoin, IPS Team Project Manager, opened the meeting with introductions. IPS Project Team members included: Beth Della Valle and Patty Castonguay. Policy Committee members present included: John Blais and Lane Wiggins of MEARNG, Eric Cousens (City Staff) and Mary LaFontaine (Ward 3 Council Member), Kevin Norcross representing the Andy Valley Sno Gypsies, Carol Segal representing Mount Apatite Farm, Frank Piffath, a resident on Mine Road, Denis D'Auteuil, Deputy Director of Auburn Public Works, Howard Kroll, Deputy City Administrator from the City of Auburn. Absent were Policy Committee members Jeff Benson, Dana Little and Mike Peters. Also present were Steve Bouchard (a neighbor of the park who has hiked in the park daily for the last 6 years) and Jennifer Williams.

**Overview:**

Kat provided an overview of the agenda, reviewed the focus of the JLUS and outlined what he had learned to date as well as where we are headed. This Joint Land Use Study is being done to protect/enhance training operations and the recreation area. We will be outlining policies & strategies to eliminate existing & avoid future conflicts and to guide growth in immediate vicinity in support of these facilities.

Current Outline for Plan will feature a cover, acknowledgements, contents, an introduction – why this, why now, the background – history of joint use, the purpose/process /existing conditions, hopes/fears/opportunities, constraints. She noted that it is very important to have above sections completed before moving on....i.e. “No Solutions” until we know what we are facing

The current outline for The Plan / Recommendations will include, comprehensive plan changes, ordinance changes, the implementation schedule, the responsibilities (Who does what/when).

She noted what we have heard to far: Users aren't sure which access road to use, Ball fields on Army land poses safety concern, way finding in Park is not clear, web sites encourage use of Mine Road, many access park on foot from nearby residential areas, foot traffic from Mount Apatite Road must past through heavy equipment training area.

We are looking into: how the area has grown since early 90s, the population, the land use & traffic, has Comp Plan & zoning changed since then?, If so, what challenges do these trends pose? What changes have been made to the Park and Training Facility since early 90s? Are there any natural resources or other constraints in immediate vicinity? What challenges might affect new access or land swap or other possible changes. Who uses area?-How and Why?

A Preliminary Outline for the JLUS Report, a Public Involvement schedule, a meeting schedule, Agenda for the meeting and JLUS Talking Points were distributed.

The minutes of the December 5<sup>th</sup> meeting were reviewed. A correction will be made to page 3 in the Comments to be noted section. The original notes stated that "unless it is changed by the Committee it will be a City park". It should have said "unless it is changed by the CITY it will be a City park".

### **Presentation for the Andy Valley Sno Gypsies was given by Kevin Norcross**

The group was formed in 1967 and it is the oldest snowmobile club in the State. It has 50 members with the average age being 60+.

Their goals are to educate their members and the general public in the principles of safety in the use of snowmobiles, promote better understanding between snowmobile owners and the general public, encourage the use of snowmobiles and the establishment/maintenance of snowmobile trails. They also promote among all snowmobilers a greater respect for the rights of property owners and other winter sports enthusiasts. He showed a map and indicated where the current trails are and showed us which ones go through Mt. Apatite Park.

Someone asked if snowmobile trails and cross country skiers use the same trails. The answer was that they cross over each other in certain areas, but they are separate trails.

There are 6 members who maintain approximately 30 miles of trails on a year round basis. They used to maintain the Cross country ski trails for the City of Auburn for a fee, but the City had to cut back expenses so they stopped paying the fee and the club did not continue to maintain the trails without being compensated. The club just bought a new groomer for the trails.

Their Clubhouse sits on land that belongs to the city of Auburn. Kevin was not sure of the agreement between the club and the city. The building is open whenever someone is working on the trails. Before they go out to work on the trails, they start a fire and leave the doors unlocked until they come back. All members of the club also have a key so they can access the building at any time. The Clubhouse is on the Small Road, and because of its location, they have been the targets of 6 break-ins in the last 2 years.

A question was asked if Kevin thought it would be possible to build a road from the ravine that starts at the Clubhouse and goes up to an old potato field to use as an access road or if he thought it would be too steep. Kevin thought it might be a possibility.

Kevin mentioned that there are gates on Garfield Road and cement barriers at MEARNG to keep vehicles out of Mt. Apatite. In the winter, members of their club use Mt. Apatite for snow shoeing, cross country skiing, snowmobiling and dog walking.

**Presentation for the Maine Army National Guard (MEARNG) was given by John Blais.**

John did a power point presentation explaining why the Joint Land Use Study was being done. It is because training areas are critical to the defense of the nation. We need to ensure that all troops (mountain, transportation, aviation, medics) have the proper training in order to serve in the roles that they have been called on to fulfill. The troops are required to get certain training and meet certain qualifications before they are eligible for promotions. The ability of the military to continue operations at a training area can be impacted by compatibility with other land uses in the surrounding area. There are concerns regarding liability,

including the ball fields. Originally, there was to be a land swap done between the City of Auburn and the Department of the Army. In 1989, the MEARNG built the ball fields for the City on Federal property on wetlands. The actual land exchange was never completed because the process got stalled due to environmental concerns with the ball fields back in 1990. As part of the mitigation, the MEARNG was required to create new wetlands and to monitor them for 5 years. Mitigation efforts were completed in 2001, but the actual land exchange never occurred. Deed research was done in the early 2000's as background work for the land exchange, and there are some restrictions on some of the potential pieces of land that limit the use of the property to recreational use only. In order for these restrictions to change, there would need to be a legal process used. There is an Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan (INRMP) for this property. There are Small Whorled Pogonias located on this land. It is one of the rarest orchids in North America.

MEARNG has a State and a Federal Mission. It is to manage the MEARNG Sustainable Range Program. A chart was shown which identifies the units which utilize the Auburn facility for training. Reduced Federal budgets have since increased the importance of existing training areas. The Auburn facility includes a baffled range (no night time firing), field expedient 203 range, a dismounted land navigation course, a maneuver/training area, a refueling pad, a site used exclusively for engineer equipment training and the Controlled Humidity Preservation (CHP) buildings which are used to store military equipment. It is important that MEARNG does not lose the footprint of the existing baffle range. Renovation of the firing range at the Auburn Training site is planned to make it safer. If a new range is built, the environmental impacts will be reduced and the noise footprint will likely be reduced as well. This training facility is important to keep in operation because all operators need time "behind the wheel" to learn how to operate the equipment safely. It requires a significant time investment to become proficient in the use of this heavy equipment. It was noted that 42% of the training is done at the Auburn facility between July and September. The Little League uses the field in April, May, June. It is always finished by the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. It was mentioned that, ideally, the City of Auburn would like to have all the cities ball fields located together some time in the future. There is no room for expansion at the current location.

John discussed the average deficit of land being used as training facilities. The average training facility is 331 acres. The MEARNG deficit for training land is

6,370 acres. The training land in Auburn is 154 acres, but it is authorized to have 646 acres, which is a deficit of 492 acres. The Army, at this point, is not willing to give up any more of its training land. They would like to have a firing range built in Maine that has more than 3,200 acres. Right now, our troops need to travel to Ft. Devens or to Vermont for record firing range training.

It was asked if all of the military organizations, (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard) have considered combining their training facilities. A Joint Facilities Review Board (MILCON) meets every year; in fact, they are currently building an Armed Forces Reserve Center.

After John's presentation, a map was placed on the tables and everyone was invited to mark it up with adjoining property owner's names, the points where people access the park, the location of Sno Gypsies Clubhouse, Mt. Apatite Farm, Frank Piffath's land, the rented parcels of land for the firing range and other items they thought were important to the process. Some of the snowmobile trails appeared to be in the wrong location on the map, so it was marked up to show the approximate location.

A discussion was had about our next steps. A survey was mentioned. Eric said that the City of Auburn has a Survey Monkey account we could use to do a survey on who uses the park, the reasons they use it and the time of year they access the park.

A discussion was had about the best way to get the information out to everyone to take the survey. Some of the responses were: Press Release, Radio station, newspaper articles, Chamber of Commerce.

The next meeting will be held on February 13, 2013, at Auburn City Hall in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Conference Room. If you park on the second level of the parking garage, you will enter the building right where the Conference Room is located.