

COÖS COUNTY PLANNING BOARD
Granite State Room
Lancaster, NH
December 15, 2021

The regular meeting was opened at 6:02 pm.

Present from the Board: John Scarinza – Chair; Scott Rineer – Vice Chair; Jennifer Fish – Clerk; Ed Mellet, Mike Waddell, Tom McCue, Rep. Troy Merner and Mike Ouellet.

Also in Attendance: Tara Bamford, Planning Consultant (via Zoom); Earl Duval, Esq. and Wayne Presby, Mount Washington Railway Company; members of the press.

PUBLIC COMMENTS NOT RELATED TO AGENDA ITEMS

None

APPOINTMENT OF ALTERNATES

Mike Ouellet was appointed for Rick Tillotson.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mike Waddell made a motion to approve the minutes of October 6, 2021. Tom McCue seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. The motion passed 7-0.

NEW BUSINESS

- a. Notice is hereby given in accordance with RSA 676:4 that the Coös County Planning Board will meet on December 15, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. at the North Country Resource Center - Granite State Room, 629 Main Street - US 3, Lancaster, N.H. to review the site plan application of the Mount Washington Railway Company for expanded winter activities to include Snowcat tours and Snowcat skiing in Thompson & Meserve's Purchase, Tax Map 1605-011. If the application is accepted by the Planning Board as a complete application, a public hearing will immediately follow. Anyone needing assistance to attend this meeting should contact the County Administrator's Office one week prior to the scheduled date.

Earl Duval, Duval & Klasnick LLC, representing Mount Washington Railway Company, presented the site plan application to the board. He provided the following narrative to the board:

***Winter Operations
The Cog Railway***

1. Existing Winter Operations:

Once the summit facilities shut down for the winter the Mount Washington Railway Company ("Cog Railway") commences winter operations. Weather permitting through the end of October and then again in the early spring, the Cog runs trains up as high as Skyline (5200'), but the primary destination throughout the winter is Waumbek Station (3800').

Marshfield Station is staffed and open daily throughout the Winter. Food, snacks, hot and cold beverages, and gifts are all available for purchase. Restrooms are open and available to all guests and visitors.

The tours to Waumbek Station are roughly one hour. Passengers leave the train for about 25 minutes to enjoy complimentary hot refreshments and a fire pit. Depending upon demand, the Cog operates between 3-5 trips per day to Waumbek Station during winter operations.

Hikers, snowshoers, uphill skiers (skinning) frequent the Cog Railway's trail alongside its tracks on a daily basis. A fee for the use of its property for recreation is charged in the same manner that ski areas charge anyone wishing to use their slopes whether their intention is to ride the lifts or traverse uphill.

During the winter months, the Cog Railway plows Base Station Road from Route 302 to Marshfield Station. Marshfield Station is plowed and accessible to all passengers and guests. Depending upon the weather and holiday schedules, between 50 and 200 vehicles visit Marshfield Station on a daily basis. The Cog Railway has parking available for several hundred vehicles.

The Cog Railway owns and operates on Pisten Bully 400 tracked snowcat. It is used to service Waumbek Station and as a backup method of evacuating passengers from a train if it were to break down and other means of evacuation were unavailable. It is used to maintain and groom the trail next to the tracks used by winter enthusiasts for back country skiing, now shoeing and climbing. It is also available to Fish and Game for rescue operations as needed.

2. Proposed Additional Winter Operations:

A. Snowcat Tours

The Cog Railway is proposing to offer snowcat tours and snowcat skiing during winter operations. At present, only one snowcat will be used for tours and skiing. The proposed snowcat tours and snowcat skiing would operate as follows:

- *Snowcat tours from Marshfield Station to Jacob's Ladder or Skyline and returning to Marshfield Station.*
- *The snowcat is equipped with a climate controlled rear cab with bench seating accommodating up to 10 passengers.*
- *Snowcat tour to remain on Cog Railway fee owned property alongside the railroad tracks.*
- *Passengers to have opportunity to disembark at Skyline (5200'), Jacobs Ladder (4600') and Waumbek Station (3800').*
- *Duration of trip to be approximately 2 hours.*
- *Passengers to purchase tickets online or in person at Marshfield Station.*
- *Tours will always be weather dependent.*
- *Daytime Operation: 8 AM to 4 PM*
- *Nighttime Operation: 5 PM to 10 PM – Special Group Tours*
- *If snowcat skiing is not booked for the day, then there could be up to 3 tours during daytime operations and 1 tour during nighttime operations. If there is overlap in guests arriving for tours this could result in up to an additional 10-12 vehicles visiting Marshfield Station.*
- *When snowcat tours are operating signage will be posted at Marshfield Station to alert hikers.*
- *Snowcat is equipped with a 2-way radio communications system (as are all trains) with the ability to contact operating trains and Marshfield Station.*
- *Snowcat Operator and Assistant.*

B. Snowcat Skiing

- *Skiers to purchase uphill ride tickets online or in person at Marshfield Station.*
- *Skiers to unload at Waumbek Station 3800', Jacobs Ladder 4600' or Skyline 5200'*
- *There will only be 1 snowcat operating for snowcat skiing with a maximum of 10 skiers per uphill ride.*
- *Skiers to remain on the Cog Railway's trail alongside the railroad tracks.*
- *Skiing will be dependent upon availability, conditions, and weather.*
- *Hours of Operation: 8 AM to 4 PM.*
- *Skiers will be offered multiple trips up the mountain with the purchase of a day pass.*
- *If there is snowcat skiing booked for the day, there will be no snowcat tours. If all skiing guests arrive independently there could be an additional 10 vehicles visiting Marshfield Station.*
- *All skiers required to sign a Release of Liability, Waiver of Claims, Assumption of Risks, and Indemnity Agreement for Wilderness Activities and will be required to purchase a Hike Safe card issued by Fish and Game to support rescue efforts.*
- *When snowcat skiing is in progress signage will be posted at Marshfield Station to alert hikers.*
- *Snowcat is equipped with a 2-way radio communications system (as are all trains) with the ability to contact operating trains and Marshfield Station.*
- *Snowcat Operator and Assistant.*

Chairman Scarinza stated that Tara Bamford reviewed the application and recommended that the application be accepted as complete with the requested waivers. Mike Waddell made the motion to accept the application as complete with the requested waivers. Tom McCue seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. The motion passed 8-0.

Chairman Scarinza opened the public hearing at 6:15 pm. There were no public comments. The hearing was closed at 6:17 pm. Mike Waddell asked if the board received any written comments or questions from abutters. Jennifer Fish responded that there was no correspondence received regarding this application. There were no further comments or questions by the board. Mike Waddell made a motion to approve the application with requested waivers as presented and Troy Merner seconded the motion. The motion passed 8-0.

Mr. Duval also provided the board with a brief update on the Waumbek Station platform. Mr. Duval has been working with an engineer and the State Fire Marshal's office. It is expected that construction will begin in the Spring.

b. 2022 Planning Services Agreement with Tara Bamford

Chairman Scarinza presented the 2022 agreement for planning services. There were no changes from the 2021 agreement. Mike Waddell made a motion to accept the proposed agreement and Tom McCue seconded the motion. The motion passed 8-0.

c. Timber Zoning Permit-PD-3 Critical Wildlife Habitat/Wagner Forest/SU 1613-010
A zoning permit application was submitted by Success Forest LLC c/o Wagner Forest Management. A timber harvest of 50 acres is planned in a PD-3 zone. The applicant consulted with NH Fish & Game wildlife biologist, Jacob DeBow. A recommendation letter from Mr. DeBow is included in the application.

d. Timber Zoning Permit-PD-3 Critical Wildlife Habitat/Wagner Forest/SU 1612-007
A zoning permit application was submitted by Bayroot, LLC c/o Wagner Forest Management. A timber harvest of 50 acres is planned in a PD-3 zone. The applicant consulted with NH Fish & Game wildlife biologist, Jacob DeBow. A recommendation letter from Mr. DeBow is included in the application.

Scott Rineer stated that he is employed by Wagner Forest Management and will abstain from the vote. Mike Waddell made a motion to approve both PD-3 permit applications. Ed Mellet seconded the motion. The motion passed 7-0.

OLD BUSINESS

None

RATIFICATION OF ZONING PERMITS

None

TIME AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next scheduled meeting is to be determined.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Ed Mellet seconded by Tom McCue to adjourn at 6:45pm.

All approved.

Respectfully submitted,
Jennifer Fish, Clerk