Town Commons Committee Minutes for October 21, 2025:

- **Call to Order:** 5:00 pm
- **Attendees:** Jeremy Litchfield (chair), Mark Fochesato (vice-chair), Blaine Moore (secretary), Jym St. Pierre, Caleb Chang (Brunswick High School), Bobin Park (Bowdoin College), Mike Ferry, Tim Carr, Nathaniel Shed (town council), Dennis Wilson (town arborist), James Ecker (town council, guest)
- **Town Commons Committee consolidation with the Recreation Commission:** James Ecker joined us from the Town Council to discuss why some committees are being merged.
    - *James's presentation comprised the following points:*
        - Brunswick is the 9th largest municipality in Maine, and we have the largest number of committees amongst the top 15 communities by size (32 committees).
        - The goal is to reduce burden, consolidate resources, and eliminate overlap.
        - Some councilors attend 5 committees per month.
        - There have been no new town staff in 2 budget cycles.
        - Some committees have been around a long time and some of their responsibilities would be better handled by newer committees.
        - The current proposal is for the Tree Committee to merge with the Conservation Commission (7 members to 9), and for the Town Commons Committee to merge with the Recreation Commission to create a new Parks & Recreation (increasing the current 5 seats to either 7 or 9 seats)
        - The Appointments Committee will request 2 names for each disbanded committee to complete their terms on the new merged committees.
        - There will be a possible adjustment of new committee charges to make sure they are up to date with new responsibilities.
        - A hearing is not set yet, and would have to go before the full Town Council followed 2 weeks later by a public hearing and then eventually by a vote of the Town Council. The goal is that this happens in the current calendar year.
    - *Committee Questions and Concerns:*
        - Jym is on multiple committees and could see where consolidation could be good. Does merging the Town Commons w/the Recreation Commission will actually streamline anything? There would be 1 less budget line item, 1 less town council member obligation, and 1 less staff member obligation. But, the Town Commons is unique, similar to Baxter State Park vs other state parks. The Town Commons runs very well and has a lot of community engagement, a full committee roster, plus student involvement. Is there criteria for determining the mergers? Jym also mentioned the difference between commissions (internal & advisory) vs committees (an external review process).
        - *Answer:* There is no specific matrix. Recreation manages a lot of great and unique locations. Could the existing committee be transitioned into a Friends of the Commons-led committee to assist Parks & Rec?
        - Tim is concerned not that the committee is going away but that a work force that is frequently at the Town Commons is being disbanded.
        - *Answer:* We could recommend that we create a model for a citizen-led organization to work with the Parks & Rec, which could potentially be

addressed directly in the new Parks & Rec charter (verbiage to directly support volunteer organizations?)
        - Jeremy recognizes that eliminating meetings for town staff and councilors is a worthy goal and is fully in support of that. Is eliminating the Town Commons the best way to do that? There are a lot of special places, but not on the level of the impact on our town that the Town Commons has had. Specifically:
            - How do we not lose the importance of that? It deserves special treatment, because no other space has the same impact.
            - How do we protect the work we've been supporting (including the chestnut and pitch pine establishment which is unique to Brunswick and requires ongoing support.)
            - We have 2 young voting members of our community that are not just here to listen but to have a voice that makes a difference with our high school and college restricted seats.
        - *Answer:* Third is easiest to address; the council is interested in making room for students on committees. As for history and special treatment, there's no existing solution but the Town Council is open to suggestions on how to include that. (There is an argument to be made that funds could continue even with a citizen-led committee that is supported by the town.) How can we move forward while easing burden on town?
        - Mark wanted to follow-up on the history and maintaining the resources we already have in place, such as the activities we organize, and how do we protect that scope?
        - *Answer:* There are already talks about an ordinance change including documentation specifically for the Town Commons. Amongst the committee, we could choose the 2 members without any pushback as the entire committee is already vetted by the appointments committee, though those seats would not be permanent. In the future, citizens would apply for open positions as they become available and would be interviewed by the Appointments Committee.
        - Jeremy clarifies that the Town Commons Committee should make a recommendation for how we could foresee the merger moving forward (whether that's, for example, a recommendation for a Town Commons specific subcommittee, or a citizen-led committee, etc.)
        - *Answer:* Yes; it would have to be approved by the Town Council.
        - Jeremy noted that in the long term interest of the Town Commons, the merger could provide access to a piece of a larger budget than we've historically requested.
        - Nat noted that he does not want to lose the energy we bring to the Town Commons, and likes the idea of TC/GC, likes the idea of a Friends of the Town Commons, along with sharing an example of an existing committee here in town that operates that way and has done fund-raising with the funds held in reserve by the town for their projects. He recommend that the town create a universal non-profit that could act as an umbrella for multiple groups like this. Nat also mentioned that having 2 student representatives should be expanded to all committees in the town as a general rule.
    - *Expected Action Items:* Please discuss points and have discussion at our meeting next month, create any proposals or requests for the merger with the

Recreation Commission, and provide the 2 names for who would continue to the new committee by the end of November.

- **New Trail Map:** We are now on Draft 7.
    - There are segments that dead-end on private property; is there a benefit vs risk to include? For example, the segment ending at 30 is the biggest concern where there is a trail to private property that continues and loops around to another trail that was previously removed from the map. (Other places, such as the trail to Bowdoin or the trail from segment points 27 to 29 already have permissions or easements with the town.)
    - Mark recommended that the intersection in question should be included because it eases wayfinding for people comparing the map to the trails that they see to make it more difficult for people to get lost.
    - Dennis expressed concern that we can't promote private property access for liability reasons, and do not want to promote illegal trail development.
    - Nat recommended that he would like to see two changes to our draft map proposal:
        - A “P” notification to highlight the parking lot at intersection #1.
        - A label for Bowdoin College at the Northern edge to help orient the map.
    - There was a discussion about whether we want to make a report and let the new committee make decisions, or get a draft recommendation ready first?
- **Next Meeting:** Tuesday, November 18th, with the following action items to prepare:
    - What can we recommend as charges to new cluster?
    - What do we want a focus that not get dropped?
    - Who do we want to recommend for the 2 new seats?
- **Meeting Adjourned:** 6:16 p.m