

My name is CJ Scott, Trail Director for the Kingdom Trail Association. Our Executive Director, Abby Long, apologizes as she is not able to be present this evening due to previously scheduled commitments including Kingdom Trail's Annual Meeting and the Vermont Community Foundation retreat. However, I am authorized to read this statement on behalf of the organization in her absence. If you have any questions following this statement, please reach out to Abby directly.

Kingdom Trails is a nonprofit trail system deeply intertwined with the local community as it is 104 private landowners who generously allow our trails to cross their properties. Many of those landowners are along Darling Ridge. Kingdom Trails is one of those Darling Ridge landowners as we own 2 parcels, a total of 400+ acres with a conservation easement to the Vermont Land Trust. One parcel of which abuts the property in question.

The lands we have conserved are now protected in perpetuity as they are key parcels not only to our trail network, but also to our community. They offer significant recreational and ecological resources. The lands are stunning as they are on either side of Vermont's NEK Scenic Byway route, offer sweeping views of Burke Mountain, productive agricultural fields, healthy forests, streams, wetlands, and river frontage.

The protection of these properties align with KT's current effort to address the challenges that accompany the popularity of our network. Kingdom Trails has experienced a rapid increase in visits over the past few years, 135,000 visits pre-COVID. KT acknowledges this level of use has increased pressure on the rural village infrastructure, the landowners, and our neighbors.

In response, KT underwent a USDA Rural Business Development Grant funded Network Capacity Study where resulting recommendations were adopted by KT. Public engagement was a key component; including an initial visioning open house with 200+ local community members attending, online surveys with 1,250+ responses, and 15 in-person and online focus groups throughout. Participants included KT landowners, town leaders, local businesses and residents of Burke, Lyndon, Kirby, and East Haven.

This Capacity Study explored dispersing use and congestion, parking, new Welcome Center locations, safer traffic flow and pedestrian crossings. Prioritization of these goals was determined by our community members and landowners. They identified as a top priority, "Relieving the pressure and stress currently being placed on landowners, communities, and roads by planning for managed growth consistent with and respecting the quality of life in the communities."

The study concluded that the primary Welcome Center and parking should remain in East Burke Village due to existing trail system layout and arrival patterns, plus input from community members as they wished to reduce vehicular and bike traffic on Darling Ridge. If interested, we are happy to share a copy of the study results and recommendations with Waypoint.

Throughout this analysis, the consulting engineers divided the existing trail system into pods. These pods represent distinct zones within the system. For each trail pod, recommendations were made to increase, maintain, or decrease trail infrastructure elements. It was determined that the South Darling Ridge pod should not increase lodging and trail capacity, rather just maintain the current situation.

Kingdom Trails also looks to the 2020 Envision Lyndon Municipal Plan to guide our own future planning. Specifically, we look to the plan's Objective 7.1 to "encourage the continued use and development of existing trail networks, including Kingdom Trails, while maintaining the rural character of scenic areas such as Darling Hill." Plus Action Item 8.5 "Explore the creation of historic overlay districts for areas like Darling Hill to help preserve historic neighborhoods and scenic viewsheds." The plan also states, "It is evident from the many public comments at meetings and surveys over the years that residents value the scenic character of the rural areas of Lyndon such as views from and along Darling Hill."

Kingdom Trails also wishes to state that our organization has not been in collaboration with Waypoint or any of their developers. The only communication we have received was by email just last week on Oct 26th. In fact, Waypoint held a meeting this summer with abutting property owners and we learned that Kingdom Trails was intentionally not invited to that meeting. So, to be very clear, for the record, Kingdom Trails has not been, nor is it currently, involved in this project.

In closing, the scale, type and extent of development proposed by Waypoint runs counter to the feedback we have gleaned from listening to the community and users and engaging them in our capacity study process over the last 18 months, and as such, Kingdom Trails does not support the project as proposed.

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