

TOWN OF MIDDLEBURY CONSERVATION COMMISSION MINUTES

Monday, August 23, 2021, 12:00–1:30 PM

In Person Location: Town Offices, 77 Main Street, Room 116, Middlebury VT

Zoom url:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87167760489?pwd=bEtXT0pURTR4NklqUGdWYkJEdFFudz09>

In Attendance: A. L'Roe, C. Harden, C. Brooks, M. Anderson, J. Howarth, C. Tate, A. Sheldon; J. Murray joined the meeting.

Call to Order

Citizen comments: Regarding the Middlebury College solar project on South St. Extended, C. Tate, an adjacent landowner, reported having received certified mail with additional information about the project, including dimensions of the battery storage (8 x 40 ft long batteries) to be installed on a concrete pad. A follow-up letter from a law firm noted that comments about the project must be submitted by Sept. 20, 2021.

A. L'Roe suggested and CC members agreed that a subcommittee will draft comments representing the conservation perspective. The subcommittee – A. L'Roe, C. Tate, and J. Howarth – will circulate a draft to CC members prior to the Sept. 20 CC meeting.

Approval of July minutes: M. Anderson moved to approve the minutes, C. Harden seconded the motion. Vote to approve was unanimous.

Report on 7/29/21 Presentation to Planning Commission: J. Howarth summarized the presentation he made to the Planning Commission (PC):

He hoped to learn whether the CC should focus on delivering a comprehensive Conservation Plan or just elements of one, how the deliverables would be incorporated into the Town Plan, and if the timing will work to aim for December 2021 for the first deliverables.

From Title 24 (VT statutes), he listed elements of comprehensive conservation plan and then proposed to deliver (1) updated descriptions and maps of conservation elements, (2) standards and methods to evaluate land for conservation (through easements and other methods), and (3) standards for preferred energy siting and other land-use conversions. He will work with Middlebury College students (GEOG310) this fall to develop these deliverables. Students will present the work in a poster session for the PC and CC on 12/9/21 and then have until 12/17/21 to make revisions. In January the PC and CC will meet to discuss next steps in formalizing the conservation plan.

J. Murray – The PC response was enthusiastic. PC looks forward to having a scientific framework to use in decision-making for land-use conversions.

M. Anderson – would the entire CC plan be an amendment to the town plan?

J. Howarth – The comprehensive plan will be delivered as a final document. Then PC and CC can sort out whether it should be an amendment or how to incorporate it into the town's process.

J. Murray – If the conservation plan fits with an amendment schedule it could be an amendment (or amendments) to the Town Plan. The town plan will need other amendments, and maps would be welcome in the short-term, for use as resource documents, e.g., a wetland map with the Arrowwood results.

C. Brooks – we'd want the Conservation Plan in the Town Plan – it should be an amendment, even if not this year.

A. L'Roe – In the meanwhile, it could be a stand-alone appendix that informs the other amendment sections (Forest Blocks, Energy Preferred Area, etc.)

A. L'Roe asked J. Howarth about the approach the student will take (thematic or regional?).

Response: the final plan will be organized both by themes and regions. Student teams will focus on parts of the town but will need to understand the broader thematic context of each region to address five points: rarity, representation, resilience, connectivity, and restoration.

C. Harden asked for an update on plans for outreach and community input. Response: J. Howarth intends to converse with some stakeholders this fall and recognizes that the 12/9 PC/CC meeting will be open to the public (as usual). After the PC and CC have had a chance to review the draft plan, it could be put online as an Adobe document for public comment.

C. Brooks moved and C. Tate seconded the motion to accept J. Howarth's proposed plan. Acceptance was unanimous.

Energy siting: A. L'Roe gave a short presentation outlining ways CC might contribute the conservation perspective to the Town's energy siting. [Link to presentation: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1BkeYiWkzISpF4NSYqABgX_9KNwmji-0MSXxabL2nga0/edit?usp=sharing]. The goal would be an amendment to the Town Plan with conservation-based guidance and maps for energy-siting decisions. A full energy plan is in the purview of the Energy Committee.

For example maps, see existing ACRPC template (see Known and Possible Constraints, Potential Resource Siting Areas maps: [Linked Here](#)). Middlebury is close to the 2025 goal for renewable energy; the 2050 goals seem within reach.

Two tiers of constraints (1) the known standard constraints – off the table for large energy citing –RPC has mapped these – and (2) potential constraints (more flexible).

A. Sheldon – recommended first inventorying the preferred sites that don't require new development (e.g., parking lots...rooftops) and seeing how close they come to being sufficient to generate the needed energy. Others agreed. RPC has estimated the energy required; CC will work with the Energy Committee to refine those numbers. Other opportunities: (1) a former Middlebury College professor (Lindsay Dreiss) whose student inventoried rooftops for solar as a J-term project, probably just in the village – results should be held at the College; (2) Acadia Hegedus, the student who recently interned with R. Hopkins may have mapped impervious surfaces; (3) the College is revisiting the use of its lands and may be open to further energy development.

Next steps – find out what's already been done. **CC members- explore the resources mentioned in L'Roe's presentation and become more familiar with opportunities and constraints of energy siting.** After January, CC will work with PC to make a recommendation about preferred sites and energy-siting decisions.

Confirmed September meeting: Monday, September 20- Noon to 1:30pm

1:25 Adjourned: M. Anderson moved to adjourn, A. Sheldon seconded. All approved the motion.