

TOWN OF MIDDLEBURY CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Monday, May 24, 2021

12:00 – 1:30 PM

Join by Web <https://middlebury.zoom.us/j/91880153974>

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MINUTES

Attending: Jeff Howarth, Andrew L’Roe, Carol Harden, Chris Brooks, Molly Anderson

12:00 Call to order

12:05 Citizen comments (None)

12:10 Approval of minutes ([April 2021](#))

M. Anderson motion to approve, J. Howarth second, Unanimously approved

12:15 [Wright Park Shrubland Expansion Program](#)

Committee discussed some concerns and questions, including:

- public visibility (communication and potential for conflict),
- using glyphosate (could they use different application techniques?),
- whether cutting will extend to ledge,
- how to monitor the impact and continue efforts?
- planning to coordinate with existing MALT TAM and Audubon/Golden-Winged Warbler efforts?

Aaron Townshend, Forestry and Natural Resource Program, Patricia A. Hannaford Career Center joined (student Zachary Botala not able to attend).

A. Townshend gave an explanation of the project- it has just started this year, but won't get much done before the end of semester.

Activities are already included in the management plan, intended to expand the early successional area into pines and maintain grassland. Maintenance will be done by Hannaford students to maintain with brush-hog. It's about a two-year cycle to mow, let re-grow and return.

The students have looked into alternatives to Glyphosate- recutting, removing with excavator, capping with plastic bags- none have worked as well. Chris Olson (the Addison County Forester) has recommended specific practices for dabbing glyphosate to prevent spread.

As for monitoring, Mark LeBarr (VT Audubon) has done mist-netting, but one has to be certified- Commission suggested that WildMidd could be involved, or successor to Steve Trombulak's Conservation Biology class at the college?

A. Townsend noted that it's a half-mile each way to the end of the trail- trying to figure out what to do with the bole wood for sale or potentially creating habitat.

They do have signage to put up to show species, public education

They would prefer to do the work in this Winter and Fall, but will probably continue work in Spring 2022.

Discussion of CC visit to site, or individual visits-

A. L'Roe will set up doodle for visit sometime next week, post notice as meeting if there is a quorum (Students are there 8:45-10:45 on weekday mornings, Aaron will send phone number for coordinating)

A. L'Roe will draft a letter of support/concerns- value of shrubland habitat, value of relationships, steps going forward.

12:30 Updates on energy planning

J. Howarth and A. L'Roe went to special energy meeting with the Energy Committee a week and half ago- A. L'Roe has started putting together a template of boiler-plate language, which the Energy Committee could continue to work on through the fall- they would prefer something that could be up-to-date, visionary, and able to monitor/follow up on.

Town Planner is interested in a map of preferred site areas that could be included in the Town Plan as an amendment

Conservation Commission could calculate rough numbers and provide recommendations/preferred area map as short-term project

A. L'Roe- the state [VELCO](#) electricity transmission grid doesn't have much capacity in a lot of areas within Middlebury, so that will add restrictions to the sites already in place and any preferred

area that can be offered.

12:40 Discuss conservation plan draft:

Town Planner interested in bringing elements of Conservation Plan into Town Plan as amendments this fall (full town plan update will be in 2025)

J. Howarth will work with the Town Planner and Planning Commission to figure out what pieces are appropriate to include and how to format them.

J. Howarth showed 3 sections of the conservation plan- base maps, landscape models, landscape plans

Base maps- state of knowledge, i.e. what do we currently know (in different categories- water, slope, wetlands, etc.) with maps and descriptions

Wetlands map shows multiple sources, and where there's agreement and differences between the state and advisory wetlands layers (Springer 2001 and Arrowood layers, neither of which had much ground-truthing)

Landscape and large green space "blocks" (<30 in number) - these identify contiguous blocks of undeveloped land. Used to define the plan's study extent because the systems described in the plan tend to transcend town boundaries.

Large "Habitat Blocks" (20 in number) contiguous blocks (>250 acres of contiguous tree-cover, wetland, or water). These are more expansive than the state's Conservation Design areas, but are all defensible.

FEMA flood zones and ANR river corridors serve flood resilience and habitat connectivity (corridors between habitat blocks).

Landscape plans- this is the heart of our recommendations of where to avoid development- with Habitat Blocks and Connectors, Floodways and river corridors. Landscape plans describe distinct sub-regions of Middlebury that are defined by environmental differences (mountain forest, valley forest and farms, Otter Creek wetlands, interior quarry and farms.

Using different wetlands layers affects the habitat blocks and connectors that show up

For the landscape plans, J. Howarth would like to zoom in to different areas with more detailed (large-scale) maps for neighborhood/public engagement.

J. Howarth's Next Steps for conservation plan-

- Identify and encourage Agricultural clusters- doesn't appear to be much conflict between conservation priorities and current Agricultural land
- Describe trail networks and trail gaps
- Measure Representativeness/GAP analysis (compare with natural community layer)
- Identify Conservation Gaps (compare with protected lands layer)

J. Howarth will continue working on this and present some maps to the Energy Committee in 2 weeks (June 9, 9am). He will send draft section pdf “plates” to individual members to review.

1:00 Discuss collaboration strategies

There was a letter put together by MALT intended for Selectboard specific to the Dutton Property (east of Means Woods), expressing some concerns about how quickly the specific property was being acquired and what the long-term management activities would be, as well as a broader need to outline a process for using Town Conservation-acquisition funds

This reinforces the need for the Conservation Commission to complete the Conservation Plan and articulate conservation priorities.

1:15 Discuss public outreach strategies

1:25 Schedule June meeting- **Monday, June 28- Noon to 1:30pm**

1:30 Adjourn