

TOWN OF MIDDLEBURY CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Monday, September 20, 2021

12:00 – 1:30 PM

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

Join by Web <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87686150291?pwd=SWRrWjBjWEd2RjFaL2w5U3p6SUFBDz09>

Join by Phone Dial: **+1 646 558 8656**. When prompted, enter the meeting ID: 876 8615 0291
Not a toll free number. Depending on your long-distance plan, charges may apply.

Minutes

Approved on October 25, 2021

In attendance: A. L'Roe, C. Harden, C. Tate, J. Howarth, C. Brooks, M. Anderson. Jen Murray joined for solar farm discussion.

12:00 **Call to Order**

Citizen Comments - none

Approval of minutes([August 23, 2021](#)) C. Brooks moved and C. Tate seconded the motion to approve the August minutes. Motion Approved.

Update on conservation plan development through Fall Middlebury College Geography course – J. Howarth summarized the plan for his Geog 310 class at the College this term that will draft parts of a conservation plan as their final assignment. The 15 students will each report on a theme in the first part of the semester, becoming familiar with natural heritage elements identified in *Conserving Vermont's Natural Heritage* (VT Fish and Wildlife, and VT Agency for Resource Conservation) and *Vermont Conservation Design* (ANR). In the second part of the semester, students will focus on specific regions within Middlebury to develop component parts of a conservation plan.

The class is taking Monday afternoon field trips to identify places with public access for ground truthing and become familiar with the town's landscapes. Middlebury Conservation Commission (MCC) members are invited to join the field trips, pending further information about the College's COVID-19 masking requirements. The class topic for Nov 12 will be energy planning.

MCC comments regarding Encore solar farm project – A sub-group of the Conservation Commission (Howarth, L’Roe, and Tate) had drafted a letter to provide comments to the PUC regarding the College’s South Street Solar Farm project. Because not enough time remains before the PUC comment deadline to submit the letter for review by the Select Board, it will be held and reworked to represent the MCC position to the Planning Commission. A key concern expressed in the letter is how the College could better include the Town in land-use planning. J. Murray invited MCC to send a representative or two to the Planning Commission meeting at noon on Nov. 4, when College representatives are expected to be present to check in about the South Street Solar Farm project.

Energy siting- siting language and constraint maps vs preferred areas– The MCC objective for preferred energy siting is to create a map for inclusion as an amendment to the Town Plan in spring 2022. An enhanced energy plan is desirable but will take more time.

A. L’Roe shared RPC maps that delineate places completely “off the table” or constrained for energy development based on the State’s guidelines¹ and maps he drafted to show existing areas with potential for energy development². Potential sites for solar development include parking lots and rooftops. He obtained the Middlebury subset of a county-wide inventory of rooftops, from the team developing the county’s Climate action plan, learning that ~15% of needed power could be obtained from rooftop solar. The RPC office in Middlebury has an interactive map of factors (constraints) for solar siting: [ACRPC - Regional Energy Siting \(qgiscloud.com\)](http://qgiscloud.com/acrpc/Regional_Energy_Siting) (http://qgiscloud.com/acrpc/Regional_Energy_Siting) (This website may be migrated soon).

Steps in the process of developing a preferred energy siting plan: (1) determine how much area will be required to generate the needed amount of energy and (2) consider two levels of factors: (i) Already “off the table” factors (e.g. wetlands) and (ii) constraints (e.g. hydric soils, deer-wintering areas, prime agricultural soils, etc.).

M. Anderson asked to clarify the role of MCC if RPC is already working on solar siting. A. L’Roe noted that MCC will propose preferred areas from a conservation perspective and consider constraints (e.g., aesthetics, forested riparian buffers) not already listed. RPC has compiled standard layers as a resource for towns, but MCC can provide additional details and insights, as will the Middlebury College Geog 310 class.

¹Static Middlebury Energy Constraints Maps from ACRPC
http://54.172.27.91/public/energysiting/municipal_maps/Middlebury_all36x48.pdf

² A map of impervious surfaces in Town: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vgpg_nnOqBrs8-YoeQFaILvndLA8b92j/view

The Town's Energy Committee has other priorities than siting, so MCC has a role to play to keep conservation priorities on the table. A. L'Roe plans to attend the Energy Committee meeting at 9 am on Wednesday, September 22..

In the discussion of energy siting, C. Harden asked whether we should plan for wind siting and M. Anderson asked about hydropower generation potential. Both merit a further look through conservation and energy lenses. The [VT Energy Atlas](#) has state-level information for these.

October meeting date:

Monday, October 25 - Noon to 1:30 pm

Tasks for MCC members to do before the Oct. meeting

1. Finalize letter to Planning Committee (make it more generally about the process going forward)
2. Think about preferred energy constraints and potential areas to include
3. Learn more about Rutland High School parking lot solar installation
4. Give some thought to new initiatives for MCC

Adjournment C. Tate moved to adjourn; C. Harden seconded. The meeting adjourned at 1:25
