

TOWN OF MIDDLEBURY CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Monday, April 18, 2022

12:00 – 1:30 PM

In-person location: Middlebury Town Office; also available remotely via Zoom

MINUTES (Aa approved at May 16 meeting)

In Attendance: A. L.'Roe, J. Howarth, C. Brooks, M. Anderson, C. Harden

A. L.'Roe called the meeting to order at 12:00.

Minutes of the March 2022 meeting ([March 2022](#)) were unanimously approved (C. Brooks moved to approve, J. Howarth seconded).

Citizen comments

J. Wiger-Grohs, who serves on the steering committee of Pollinator Pathway (PPath) of Addison County (<https://www.pollinator-pathway.org/towns/addison-county>), reminded the Conservation Commission (CC) that PPath aims to promote the well-being of pollinator species by improving their habitats, avoiding the use of pesticides and herbicides, and encouraging native species. For the health of pollinators and other organisms, PPath recommends against using seeds or buying plants from seeds treated with neonicotinoids (buyers of plants at places like Agway should ask before purchasing).

When asked about the Pollinator Pathway position on [No Mow May](#), J. Wiger-Grohs reported that steering committee members are generally supportive because actions that allow invertebrates to get a healthy start are viewed positively, notwithstanding the fact that dandelions are neither native nor important for our local pollinators (nor is the state flower, red clover, native).

A.L.'Roe offered to co-write an Addison Independent article with his neighbor to get the word out about No Mow May and point readers to Pollinator Pathway as a local resource.

J. Wiger-Grohs commented that she was excited to see the developing draft of the Conservation Plan and offered the assistance of the Town's Tree committee if the CC should want help with the tree canopy part of the plan.

Conservation Plan

1. Introduction

This working session began by focusing on the overall goals expressed in the Conservation Plan's introduction. [<https://conservation-plan.github.io/middlebury-vermont/>]

The Introduction expresses higher level goals and shows values – climate, biodiversity, recreation – used as criteria for conservation.

The first goal is for at least 30% of the Town's lands to be natural habitats by 2030. We may already be at the 30% goal if agricultural land is lumped together with natural land but separating farmland from natural lands to better fit the spirit of that goal (which is also a national goal).

J. Howarth suggested that the introduction clarify the connections between land conservation between land conservation and climate change. This point can be woven into an introductory paragraph. M. Anderson suggested being explicit about biodiversity conservation and climate change resilience as conservation goals and mentioning restoration of degraded/vanishing ecosystems.

Specific suggestions for the Introduction:

M. Anderson: make goal #5 (communication and engagement) #1.

C. Harden: specify the goals are for this plan, add hyperlink to show source of 'clear written community standards', spell out acronyms.

In the **Land parcels** section:

This section was designed to parallel the Land Parcels in the Conservation Atlas and present overall goals for conserving natural lands and farmlands. The land parcel section appears to overlap with the section on forest blocks. The title "Land parcels" could be changed if people find it confusing. Should natural communities be included in the land parcel section? The later Forest Blocks section is more specific to forests and ties directly to Act 171.

We discussed adding a UVA (Use Value Appraisal) layer to the protected area map in the Conservation Atlas. If the legislature does not change the UVA requirements, forest lands with UVA will continue to be required to be cut, making those lands essentially different from other forested lands.

Other suggestions for natural lands were to:

(1) Re-arrange the second goal to put "reserve at least 10% of these lands with minimal disturbance" before the phrase about sustainable forestry.

(2) Drop the word "maintain" and simply say "promote" sustainable forestry.

(3) Split land parcels into three, to separate managed forests from natural lands.

2. Forest Blocks

This section is guided by state policy. We noted that the state language about forest blocks emphasizes fragmentation and is most relevant to mountain forests. In the Champlain Valley portion of Middlebury, other qualities may be more important for conservation than simply the area of the block – how can we best convey that? One concern expressed is that current restrictions do not prevent habitat fragmentation (e.g., building a long driveway in a currently forested block) in what we have designated as forest blocks in the Valley. Once the Conservation Plan is part of the Town Plan, will we be able to request a review of a proposal to develop a priority forest block?

Some earlier text could be added back in. C. Brooks recommended more direct mention of past land-use history and potential future restoration. He also suggested including language that could be used to guide specific land use/land management decisions.

J. Howarth noted that interesting characteristics can be gleaned from the maps, such as that clay plain forests have higher perimeter-to-area ratios than other forest stands.

Should there be a section about carbon sequestration? For example, managing for old growth is helpful for sequestering carbon. Carbon sequestration – there is value in letting forests become old.

Some unused agricultural land could be converted to forest to meet conservation goals.

3. Other sections of the draft Conservation Plan

Field Blocks – J. Howarth expressed uncertainty about the inclusion of field blocks and thought we might include a section on natural communities.

Urban – This incomplete section is challenging, as conservation goals such as requiring low-impact development affect zoning and enter the purview of other Town commissions and boards. There are also conservation opportunities in the urban part of the Town, such as increasing habitat and connectivity for species such as butterflies and birds.

In the interest of not taking on more than we can complete, we will revisit that section later and possibly cut it. Likewise, we will revisit the Paths section later and potentially remove it from this version of the Conservation Plan.

4. Our homework for the next Conservation Commission meeting is to:

- (1) Revisit the Conservation Plan up to Urban districts.
- (2) Give particular attention to how to present and improve the land parcel section.

- (3) Each CC member will list their (five) highest level goals for conservation in Middlebury.
- (4) Use the Comment form for comments. That way, we will be able to see each other's comments, but not interact about them until the meeting.

Next monthly meeting – Monday, May 16, 2022

At the May meeting we will look at the Conservation Plan and specifically at the forest block language. The Energy siting team (C. Brooks, J. Howarth, C. Harden) will give an update on the [Draft Renewable Energy Siting Proposal](#)

A. L'Roe adjourned the meeting at 1:30 pm. (M. Anderson moved to adjourn, C. Harden seconded the motion; all were in favor).