

TOWN OF MIDDLEBURY CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Monday, August 29, 2022

12:00 – 1:30 PM

In Person Location: Middlebury Town Office; remote access via zoom

MINUTES

Approved on Sept. 24, 2022

12:00 Call to Order

In attendance A. L'Roe, C. Harden, C. Brooks, A. Sheldon, C. Tate, J. Howarth

Approval of minutes from ([July 2022](#))

J. Howarth moved to approve, C. Tate seconded the motion, all approved.

Citizen Comments and Updates

- (1) L'Roe called attention to the expansion plan for Otter Creek Childcare Center on Weybridge St. that was considered at last week's Selectboard meeting. Two concerns emerged: (1) that the proposed driveway lies on or directly adjacent to a gully that drains much of the rainfall runoff from the College and (2) that an opportunity might exist to extend MALT's current easements along Otter Creek and create a trail from the Stone Mill to Otter View Park. A L'Roe will stay in touch with J. Brookside about this, as MALT holds easements along Otter Creek. A. Sheldon recalled that, years ago, the easements had been challenging to obtain and came as donations. J. Howarth recommended that the developer start with a constraint map to avoid the surprises and added expenses that topography and drainage might cause. Given the site's riparian location and the importance of flood hazard avoidance, funds might be available to support additional easements.

Action – We will visit the site, draft a statement, and take this up at the Sept. meeting.

- A.L'Roe will stay in touch with J. Brookside (MALT).

- (2) Middlebury Local Hazard Mitigation Plan and Hazard ranking

A L'Roe, who serves on the committee to update the local hazard mitigation plan, invited CC members to contact him to weigh in about relative vulnerabilities.

Updates on Draft Conservation Plan and Next Steps

J. Howarth discussed the maps and graphs he has developed and the organizational approach he has taken, which has four parts: Assessment, Prescription, Evaluation, and Prescription.

The Assessment characterizes current land covers as old fields, wooded places, water, active fields (including the golf course), and developed lands, and compares the current status of each habitat type to its natural extent (at town founding, as inferred from soils). The Prescription map, based primarily on forest habitat blocks, wildlife connectors, and scenic fields, displays areas most important for conservation and places that could be appropriate for new development. Evaluation examines the evidence in light of the goals of conserving 30% of Town land by 2030 and 50% by 2050. One evaluation, with a focus on forest, supports the case for reforestation, especially of sites previously in valley clayplain and wet valley clayplain forests, and indicates that adding protection for forest habitat blocks would meet the goals for protecting rare species. A separate evaluation of lands with open cover, including farmland, compares current levels of protection to the levels of 2030 and 2050 goals.

J. Howarth proposed a list of additional evaluations, which could focus on protecting rare species in wetlands, distinguishing habitat connectors in active vs old fields, identifying prime soils in open active fields category, characterizing deer wintering habitat, etc. Some or all of these evaluations will be future projects.

CC members admired the rigor and care of the current version of the Conservation Plan, approved the approach taken, and held a discussion that centered on whether to add an additional section on prioritization, where to fit in recreation, and what form the end point (deliverable) of the Conservation Plan should take. We agreed to replace the section on prioritization with one of recommendations. One recommendation will be for the Town to update its forest block description. Recreation will fit into the Evaluation section. Promoting connectivity is a core part of climate adaption planning, as well as a conservation priority.

Next Steps

- CC members will provide feedback to J. Howarth on the “to-do” list shown on one of the slides.
- J. Howarth will work on Conservation Plan slides offline this week, then provide access to the slides/draft so that CC members can review it and draft recommendations before the next meeting.
- CC members are encouraged to propose recommendations for the final section. Because of the need for consensus on the recommendations, the CC will prepare to discuss and approve them at the September meeting.

A. L’Roe adjourned the meeting at 1:30 pm. **The next meeting will be on September 26, 2022.**