

TOWN OF MIDDLEBURY CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Monday, July 25, 2022

12:00 – 1:30 PM

In Person Location: Middlebury Town Office, also via zoom

MINUTES, Approved on Aug. 29, 2022

Call to Order 12:06 pm

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

Approval of minutes ([June 2022](#)): M. Anderson approved, C. Tate seconded -the minutes were approved as written.

Citizen Comments and Updates

1. A. L-Roe announced that Addison County River Watch Collaborative ([ACRWC](#)) has a project in the Barnes Brook watershed and will host a gathering at the Middlebury Rec Park pavilion at 10 am on Saturday, July 30 ([Details here](#)).
2. M. Anderson recently learned that a 200-ac parcel in E. Middlebury, which the Conservation Commission had previously identified as having conservation potential, has been purchased by a group of families/individuals (see **Land Purchases** section below).
3. M. Anderson's neighbor, Harley Grice visited her recently and seemed surprised to learn that his property contains some valley clayplain forest. She asked if some of us could walk through to see it and he agreed – she will talk to him to set up a time. Mr. Grice's land, not presently under easement, lies east of Halpin Rd. J. Howarth noted that VLT holds other conservation easements in the Munger Valley area and that this property would not have much public access, which would make it a good choice for private conservation.

Conservation Commission Response to Zoning Bylaws proposal

A. L'Roe posted a draft response letter from Conservation Commission and added a [FEH background memo](#) by A. Sheldon.

Action: Because not all members of the Conservation Commission had a chance to review the draft, members are asked to weigh in by this Friday (July 29) so that he can send a revised version to the Select Board on Monday.

L'Roe asked whether the letter should also include statements about forest zoning or energy siting, or whether those should be left as topics to think about for a future round of zoning bylaws. CC members agreed that, yes, it will be best to at least mention these as topics of concern.

Land purchases

The Conservation Commission had previously raised the possibility of working to acquire the Pratt Road parcel for conservation ([See part 2 of memo here](#)). News that the Pratt Road parcel in East Middlebury/Salisbury has been purchased led to a discussion of opportunities to secure land for conservation, especially land abutting the National Forest and located inside the Proclamation Boundary. In the case of the E. Middlebury/Salisbury parcel, A. Sheldon commented that the land is rather wet, with only four potential residential units on the Middlebury side.

The broader question is what role the Conservation Commission could play if/when other parcels, particularly those adjacent to the National Forest become available? Opportunities arise when lands are in transition; having a procedure to follow and partners already designated would help the Conservation Commission act more effectively.

A number of points were raised in the ensuing discussion: (1) Middlebury has a Conservation Fund (on the order of \$300K). The Town (not the Conservation Commission) is in charge of this fund, but the Conservation Commission should be prepared to advise regarding its use. (2) The Conservation Plan (still in development) intends, not to prioritize specific parcels, but to provide rationale, advocate, and inform others, such as MALT and the Selectboard, when properties are in transition. (3) Purchasing land is one of a suite of options for conservation. We can add to the Tools section of the Conservation Plan to clarify the priorities and procedures for acquiring land for conservation. (4) Lands are in transition in neighboring towns, so this is a good time to reach out to Conservation Commissions (e.g., Salisbury, Bristol) to develop working relationships that could help us collectively better protect lands in transition. (5) More specifically, given that A. Johnson appears to be selling off properties, having recently sold land in Leicester as well as the Pratt Road property in E. Middlebury/Salisbury, it would be helpful to know his plans, especially as he owns other lands in Middlebury that might be of interest for conservation.

Action: A. Sheldon will informally reach out to A. Johnson to inquire about his plans, and to MALT and the Bristol Conservation Commission to explore their interests in acquiring land for conservation.

Updates on Draft Conservation Plan:

Work on the Conservation Plan is ongoing ([Updated Text](#)). J. Howarth is spending one or two days each week on the data and maps. The Conservation Plan will be timeless but the accompanying maps will change over time.

A. L'Roe reported that Jamie Brookside (MALT) had responded that she would like to see more about recreation and less about land acquisition. Having previously decided not to include a section on recreation in the plan, this stimulated discussion. M. Anderson noted that public support for conservation is largely based on public interest in recreation; A. Sheldon suggested ensuring that recreational opportunities would be part of checklist when prioritizing lands for conservation. We will add a short section on Recreation/public access.

In the current draft, goals and recommendations should be more specific (e.g., align forest blocks with forest zoning). Also, the Conservation Tools section needs more work.

Actions:

- (1) All Commission members should review and comment on the current draft before the August meeting. J. Howarth will make sure the maps fit; others are asked to help with writing/editing.
- (2) J. Howarth, C. Harden, and A. L'Roe will meet to incorporate suggestions, add a section on recreation /public access and improve the current draft before the next Commission meeting.

Updates on Energy siting restrictions proposal

The clear priority from a conservation perspective is to put solar power production on sites already developed (e.g., rooftops, parking lots, brownfields). The Conservation Commission will focus on the Conservation Plan first. [Draft Renewable Energy Siting Proposal](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 1:21 pm (A. Sheldon moved to adjourn, C. Tate seconded, all agreed).

The date of the next monthly meeting is not yet known. A. L'Roe will circulate a Doodle poll to identify the best date.