

TOWN OF MIDDLEBURY CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Monday, March 28, 2021

12:00 – 1:30 PM

In person at the Town Office and via zoom

MINUTES

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

**Attendees** – Commission members: Andrew L'Roe, Molly Anderson, Charlotte Tate, Carol Harden, Any Sheldon, Jeff Howarth, Chris Brooks. Citizens: Ruth Sproull and Leon Smith.

**Citizen Comments**

L. Smith lamented that the Conservation Commission (CC) hadn't been involved before the DRB and Selectboard approved construction and blasting on the Bushey property. The project has conservation consequences but is now underway.

C. Harden commented that the CC should make an effort to advise the Development Review Board (DRB) in the future. Further suggestions included attendance at DRB meetings and reaching out directly to J. Murray and/or individuals on the DRB. J. Howarth advised having clear triggers of when the CC should be invited to advise on development-related decisions. C. Brooks suggested inserting language to identify those triggers into the Conservation Plan.

C. Harden asked A. Sheldon to comment on H606 ([Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act](#)). Representative Sheldon sponsored this bill, which passed with strong support in the House and is now waiting to be taken up by the Senate. H606 requires that 30% of Vermont land be conserved by 2030, 50% by 2050, including the use of ecological reserve areas to protect highest priority natural communities and maintain or restore old forests. It follows USGS language, with three tiers of conserved land (Ecological Reserve Areas, Biodiversity Conservation Areas, and Natural Resource Management Areas), and uses VT Conservation Design as a guide. A. Sheldon also reported that the VT House is proposing changes to Vermont's Use Value Appraisal program to not require timber harvesting on forested lands.

**Approval of minutes** of last meeting ([February 2022](#)).

M. Anderson moved to accept the minutes, C. Tate seconded and the minutes were approved with no dissent.

## **Deliverables from the Arrowwood contract ([Folder here](#))**

J. Howarth briefly summarized: Arrowwood completed their contract as a straightforward GIS project (no evident field component). They used their own wetland map (the CC notes that the Arrowwood wetland map differs a little from wetland maps from other sources). Arrowwood's forest blocks map is more accurate than the one previously done by ANR, but the CHU (contiguous habitat unit) map omits a number of forested blocks. Arrowwood used least path analysis to model connecting corridors. Given the similarities in results between Arrowwood's model and the CC's Conservation Plan method of using contiguous forest and riparian connectors, J. Howarth suggested that the latter is more straightforward and easier for people to understand and follow.

Concerns about the Arrowwood results were voiced: some methods, particularly the friction surface portion of the model, are not accompanied by maps and thus are not transparent or easy to evaluate. Also, the work, limited to the Town of Middlebury, does not show connections to habitat beyond the town boundaries.

Given differences between the Arrowwood maps and those in the Conservation Atlas, the question is whether and how the CC can build on the Arrowwood plan. Recognizing that maps have power, CC members agreed that the Town could benefit from feedback from the CC about the Arrowwood maps.

A. L'Roe suggested that the CC might use the Arrowwood maps as a starting point for public outreach. By getting citizens involved, especially to contribute their knowledge of wildlife corridors, the CC could build on and refine this effort to identify wildlife corridors. L. Smith commented that the [Mooney property](#) north of Seminary Street Extension, now under consideration by the town, is an active wildlife corridor, although it does not appear as a corridor on the Arrowwood map. He has even seen a Fisher there. J. Howarth suggested that neighborhood outreach could be a way of getting feedback from the public about conservation. In a discussion of which maps to use, J. Howarth reminded the CC that maps should be used as tools for engaging people in conversation, not as literal representations of a single truth. Areas where multiple maps agree are areas of greater confidence.

## **Conservation Plan comments and review**

Draft Conservation Plan: <https://conservation-plan.github.io/middlebury-vermont/>

A discussion of the goals expressed in the draft Conservation Plan led to consideration of how best to advise the Town when properties important to conservation goals become available for purchase. CC members noted the need for inclusion and good collaboration among Town commissions and other organizations (e.g., MALT) at such times. Having an approved Conservation Plan will be a helpful step forward, as would knowing the College's long-term (decade-scale) plans for conservation and development of lands it owns in Town. L. Smith shared a link to the application MALT uses to conserve land:

[<https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn%3Aaaid%3Ascds%3AUS%3A794985c7-1b04-4fd3-a5bc-856b13ae9a9c#pageNum=2>].

The CC will use parts of its meetings to workshop portions of the draft Conservation Plan, with the goal of completing the plan by the end of summer. The focus during the April meeting will be on the introduction and land parcel sections.

### **Energy siting restrictions proposal update**

Potential working group (can only be 3 or less): C. Brooks, J. Howarth, C. Harden

[Draft Renewable Energy Siting Proposal](#)

[Draft Renewable Energy standards and Siting language](#) (not as relevant, just for awareness)

A. L'Roe shared a draft map and clarified that it was intended to show areas that are potentially appropriate and inappropriate, from the Conservation Commission perspective, for siting energy (solar) projects of 500 KW or more. J. Howarth noted that bat habitat sites are not shown on the draft map. The CC does not have the authority to create an Enhanced Energy plan but has been asked to provide guidance for preferred energy siting. The subcommittee will work on this before the next CC meeting.

**Next meeting - Monday, April 18, 2022.** We will devote 30 minutes to a workshop on the first parts of the Conservation Plan.

The meeting adjourned at 1:40 pm. A. Sheldon moved to adjourn, C. Tate seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.