

TOWN OF MIDDLEBURY CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Monday, April 24, 2023

1:00 – 2:00 PM

Location: In person at Middlebury Town Office or by Zoom

MINUTES

Approved June 27, 2023

A. L'Roe called the meeting to order at 1:10 pm

In attendance April 24: A. L'Roe, C. Harden, C. Brooks, C. Tate, J. Howarth

Minutes of the March 27 meeting ([March 2023 minutes](#)) were unanimously accepted with minor corrections.

Updates and Activities

- Town reservoir amphibian rescue/transport: A. L'Roe reported that he will be part of a small team rescuing amphibians from the pond on Chipman Hill later this week.
- A public forum on Barnes Brook will be held on **Tuesday, May 2nd from 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm** at the Champlain Valley Unitarian Universalist Society sanctuary. C. Harden will represent the Conservation Commission and give a short presentation about the history of Barnes Brook watershed. She has joined the ACRWC water quality monitoring effort this year.
- J. Howarth suggested that water quality in other small streams in the area be monitored. Currently, the state assigns the ACRWC sampling sites and does the labwork at no cost to ACRWC. If ACRWC is unable to monitor other streams, there may be a monitoring role for the Conservation Commission.
- A L'Roe will participate in a vernal pool field trip for the Master Naturalist program later this week.
- **Green-Up Day: Saturday May 6, 2023:** Two Middlebury students, Chad Kim and Audrey Welsh, are coordinating Green-Up Day in Middlebury this year. C. Harden met with them and offered that the Conservation Commission will help oversee one of the pick-up/drop-off sites [the park across from Twilight on Academy St. or the

Town Public Works building on Route 7]. All Green-Up-Day trash collected by the Town must be in Green-Up bags. Those are available now at the Town Offices and MALT and will be available at the pick-up/drop-off sites in the morning of May 6, beginning at 9:00 am. Trash is to be dropped off at these sites from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. C. Harden will distribute a sign-up sheet to Conservation Commission members to firm up the times we can commit to.

- Sophie Johnson will lead riparian restoration sessions at Ledge Farm on Wednesday May 3 and Friday May 12. J. Howarth will send information about these events to Conservation Commission members.

Conservation Presentations to the Planning Commission

In his presentation at the May 4 meeting of the Planning Commission, J. Howarth will show the map of forest blocks, connectors, and grassland habitats that correspond to Act 171 and discuss the importance of evaluation as choices are made to protect specific parcels. Do the chosen parcels meet conservation goals for their area? Do the sites represent natural assemblages? Do they contain rare species? Do they fill basic ecosystem functions? Students in his course at Middlebury College are doing assessments as their final reports, but those won't be completed before the May 4 meeting.

C. Tate asked whether the May PC meeting would be the last for this series of conservation presentations. J. Howarth will ask the PC if it would like to follow up this series with one or more additional conservation-oriented meeting(s). C. Harden noted that the process of holding these informational meetings for the PC seems to have helped develop familiarity and trust, as well as having conveyed information, tools, and perspectives.

J. Howarth reported that the State will release new delineations of forest blocks but won't be designating connectors this year. The connectors J. Howarth has shown on the conservation maps are in low terrain and touch two or more habitat blocks. He also reported that UVM has not yet released the new state dataset that had been anticipated for March.

In response to the question – what do we recommend that the PC do with the conservation-oriented information we are providing them? – discussion centered on two points: (1) making the forest blocks Forest Districts, recognizing that a forest block may be on private land; and (2) requiring that development consider habitat connectivity and that developers be required to propose mitigation measures when connectivity is interrupted.

Future Conservation Commission Activities

1. Commission members agreed that it would be valuable to get together with other local conservation commissions, especially those in towns that border Middlebury.
2. Maps are an important first step, but they need ground-truthing. Ground-truthing activities for the maps in the Conservation Atlas, such as animal track surveys or identifying grassland birds, could be done either by the Conservation Commission or as citizen science outreach. It would be interesting to identify grassland birds, not only in sites that fit the ANR definition, but also in sites that come close to those criteria but don't quite fit.
3. Keep the Development Review Board supplied with conservation maps. Moving forward, the Conservation Commission may want to hire a summer intern to maintain the maps.

A. L.'Roe **adjourned** the meeting at 2:00 pm.

Next Meeting

The intended date of the next meeting, May 22, appears problematic. A. L.'Roe will circulate a poll to determine the date of the next meeting.