

TOWN OF MIDDLEBURY CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Monday, January 23, 2023

1:00 – 2:00 PM

In Person Location: Middlebury Town Office. Participants could also join by Zoom.

MINUTES

Approved at February 27, 2023 meeting

A L'Roe called the meeting to order at 1:05 pm.

In attendance today: A. L'Roe, M. Anderson, A. Sheldon, C. Brooks, C. Tate, C. Harden

Commissioners unanimously approved minutes from the December meeting ([December 2022](#)), with permission given to the clerk (C. Harden) to add a note, if needed, to update the plans for CC members meeting with the Planning Commission.

Updates and Comments

(1) The schedule for upcoming thematic discussions by the Conservation Commission at Planning Commission (PC) meetings is:

- 2/2: Overview
- 3/2: Scenic routes and vistas
- 4/6: Habitat blocks and connectors
- 5/4: Rivers and wetlands

J. Howarth will present the perspectives, maps, and analyses on these themes, developed in ongoing work to prepare a conservation plan. A. L'Roe and other CC members will also attend when they can. The meetings are at noon on the first Thursday of the month. The PC also meets mid-month.

(2) The CC will co-host a forum on Barnes Brook with Addison County Riverwatch Collaborative, probably at the end of May.

(3) CC members and others interested in Middlebury's environment are invited to attend the talk "Deicing roads: a slippery slope for streams?" to be given by Molly Costanza-Robinson and

Eric Moody (both Middlebury College professors) at Lost Monarch Café (3 Mill Street), 5:30-6:30 pm on Thursday February 2. This talk is part of the regular series (second Thursdays) of the Midd Science Café.

- (4) Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions (AVCC) is anticipated to invite submissions for Tiny Grants, with a deadline around early April (<https://vtconservation.com/>). C. Harden noted that Middlebury is not currently a member of AVCC (membership expired in 2017), thus not eligible. For a Tiny Grant. CC members were in consensus that we should rejoin AVCC. A. L'Roe will ask the Town to pay the \$50 membership fee. C. Harden commented that the AVCC Handbook (2021) (<https://vtconservation.com/handbook/>) is very useful and she encouraged CC members to read it.

Terms of Office and Officers

CC Terms run from May through April of the final (4th) year. Terms of two members, C. Brooks and C. Harden, expire in 2023, but both are eligible to serve another term. They both expressed interest in remaining on the commission.

Following approval of these term extensions by the Selectboard, the CC will vote for officers. C. Harden, currently vice-chair/clerk agreed to be nominated to be chair, but nominations remain open. CC members were asked to consider being nominated (or self-nominating) for the vice-chair/clerk position.

Goals for Conservation

A. L'Roe proposed that the CC prepare a short (10 page or less) statement of conservation goals and recommendations, based on ongoing work, the ANR, and the 2014 plan led by A. Sheldon. A. Sheldon suggested that this summary plan contain vision as well as goals, actions, and strategies. A. L'Roe will put a draft into the shared Google drive and CC members should prepare to discuss it at the February meeting. The proposed document is intended to complement the Conservation Atlas and analytical work being led by J. Howarth.

Comments on this proposal were favorable. At a minimum, we agreed that the CC should approve its own plan. We also hope it will also become incorporated into the Town Plan. C. Brooks stressed the importance of getting appropriate wording into the Town Plan to guide Act

250 debates and development planning. In preparation for discussion of this draft at the next meeting, we will think about the categories it includes [e.g., Where do invasive species fit? Do we want to include recreation?].

Commission goals and upcoming activities

To plan for the next year or more, each CC member suggested some priorities and/or activities for the CC. At the February meeting, each member will choose something to spearhead.

1. Continue to develop the Conservation Plan and work to get key points into the Town Plan.
2. Set up the process for using Conservation fund for conservation projects. What are the steps?
3. Keep alive the vision of the “emerald necklace” around the town and pay special attention to the status of properties that would add to it (e.g., the College’s Sabourin Farm property off of Route 7).
4. Pay attention to state-level legislative initiatives that could affect our area. [An advantage: CC member A. Sheldon now chairs the Energy and Environment Committee in the House.]
5. Clarify our mission.
6. Interact more closely with Town decision-makers
Examples: the planned discussions about conservation with the PC, frequent attendance at PC meetings to develop closer working relationships between PC and CC.
7. Have a visible presence at Town Meeting in March.
For example, pre-COVID, the CC displayed a poster at the meeting.
8. Coordinate efforts with other local groups:
 - Co-sponsor forum in May with Riverwatch.
 - Contribute to, lead, and/or coordinate Earth Day activities (Earth Day will be Saturday, April 22, 2023).
 - Partner with MALT (Middlebury Area Land Trust) to co-sponsor Green-up Day.
 - Maintain close relations with MALT to see how we might work together on our common goals. Meet with MALT annually. [An advantage: CC member C. Brooks serves on MALT’s Land Committee.]
 - By summer 2023, look for an opportunity to participate in some way in the process of helping the College plan for the future management of its lands.
 - Reach out to realtors to become better informed about lands that may change hands.
 - Meet with other CCs in the area (Cornwall, Bristol, Ripton, and others).
 - Partner with Tree Warden and other groups to observe Arbor Day (first Friday in May).

- Collaborate with gardening groups to reduce the presence of invasive plants and promote the introduction of native species.
 - Discuss water security concerns with the Town’s water supply team.
9. Host or co-host outings for the public.
For example, lead walks to identify animal tracks in snow, especially in areas where animals are thought to cross roads.
10. Intersect with elements of the CEAC action plan.
Examples: plant more trees to reduce the micro-heat island effect or help accelerate the transition from dairy to diversified farm operations.
11. Other ideas:
- Think about the role of farmland in local conservation.
 - Conserve prime agricultural soils – keep them from being developed.
 - Design a project that could be proposed in April for an AVCC Tiny grants.
 - Have our own website or at least a calendar promoting relevant events and talks – to alert CC and community members.

Adjournment

M. Anderson moved to adjourn and C. Tate seconded the motion. All were in favor. A. L’Roe adjourned the meeting at 2:03 pm.

Next monthly meeting: February 20, 1:00 pm

[Note: because Town offices were closed on Feb. 20 (Presidents’ Day) the meeting date was changed to Feb. 27.]

In preparation for the February meeting, CC members will look at the draft of goals and recommendations and think about what action they would like to lead on in the next year.