

TOWN OF MIDDLEBURY CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Monday, September 21, 2020

12:00 – 1:30 PM

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MINUTES

(Approved at October 19, 2020 meeting)

Members Present: Jeff Howarth, Andrew L'Roe, Carol Harden, Chris Brooks, Judy Wiger-Grohs
(Jen Murray joins at 12:20 and Molly Anderson at 12:30)

12: 00 Call to Order

12:05 Citizen Comments

- None

12:10 Approval of minutes

- [August 24, 2020](#)

- Motion: C. Harden, Second: C. Brooks, Unanimously approved

12:15 Discussion of Arrowwood's [wetland map](#)

- Michael Lew-Smith from Arrowwood is currently in field and unable to attend
- J. Howarth showed Field Visit (Yes/No/Drive-by/unlabeled) and Confidence (High/Medium/Low/Confirmed/unlabeled) variables in the Wetlands layer. Very few of the mapped wetlands features had a 'Yes' value for the field visit. The majority of the wetland features were unlabeled (for field visit). It was not clear how to interpret Confidence values.

- Upcoming work plan- last two years have a lot of field work budgeted. Should this be re-evaluated? Will difficulties of access on private lands affect work plan?
- C. Harden: how are we to interpret differences between new map and previous map? Do they mostly come from differences in methodology or do they reflect real changes?
- A. L'Roe: what are ramifications of the new wetlands map? Is it adopted to ANR Atlas as a new/updated advisory layer or Middlebury planning/parcel site? Does it get combined with previous maps or does it replace those maps? How does it get incorporated into town decisions?
- J. Wiger-Grohs: are wetlands in proposed clearcut mapped (agreed to revisit issue during VTrans agenda)

12:25 Discussion of Arrowwood's [wildlife habitat and upland community work](#)

- C. Harden- can they clarify the intent of the project and how they plan to incorporate soils maps etc. with what they see on the ground?
- J. Howarth: Will they deliver the habitat layer and upland communities layer products after year 3 (and before fieldwork is completed in years 4 & 5)?
- J. Murray: is there opportunity for people to participate in fieldwork?
- C Brooks: May have students interested in taking part (may also be Midd students)
- J. Howarth- is it all winter fieldwork for tracking or is there a spring/fall component?
- J. Howarth and A. L'Roe will have a conversation with Arrowwood representatives tomorrow (9/22) and report back to the Conservation Commission about their discussion.

12:35 Staff updates - VTrans tree clearing at Middlebury Airport

- There is a public hearing in October- do we as CC want to submit a statement?
- J. Howarth- forested area did exist in 1942 (air photos), but has clearly been modified since
- C. Harden- Conservation commission should make some statement for conservation value of parcel
- J. Wiger-Grohs- haven't seen much documentation of actual safety concerns. Monitoring bat activity was supposed to be a piece of this- she would like to see data. Tree-committee is formulating a response. Why doesn't wetland work require a permit?
- C. Brooks- this is a nice area, often walked through, would be good to get statement
- A. L'Roe- not ideologically opposed to a clearcut, especially if it is necessary for safety, but agree that the safety reasons need to be documented and wetlands should be adequately buffered.

- J. Murray- the town can always submit comments- she will work with Selectboard to submit a joint statement. J. Murray will attend Oct 22 hearing and make sure information gets to Act 250 commissioners.
- Select Board hearing is October 13th, need to have comments by Oct 7th.
- M. Anderson joins call - against the clearcutting generally, doesn't see the need for clearcutting of this particular area.
- J. Howarth can prepare letter if we send ideas in the next couple days

12:45 Commissioner updates

- J. Howarth- there was a request from a Cornwall Conservation Commissioner about town funding mechanisms and spending- Asked Jen to respond and to share her answers with him. Jen said she would talk to Kathleen Ramsey about it.

12:50 Conservation Plan (CP) - State-level strategies

- What state policies can help local conservation and how can Town be a model for the state? Amy will provide a prompt for discussion and more details at a future meeting. The Commission encouraged her to continue work to move forward on state-level actions.

1:05 CP - Creek maps

- J. Howarth reported on work to define a Lowland Conservation District. Felt that the simplest approach was to adopt boundaries of Flood Hazard Area, ANR River Corridors, and municipal streams setbacks. Found that the Town Zoning and Subdivision Regulations (p81-82) have setback distances that refer to a "GIS map" at Town Office. What map does this refer to? The language refers to "year-round" (perennial) streams. What criteria used to define these streams? A. L'Roe- the state corridor and stream protection language refers to drainages over 2 and 0.25 square miles.
- J. Howarth has found a number of errors in the National Hydrography datasets that compromises their use for local-scale planning - he is working to update/make corrections.
- With an updated stream map and understanding of the relationship to setbacks, it would make it possible to identify lands with regulatory protection through subdivision guidelines and potential ANR river corridor protections for small streams.
- J. Murray- not sure where the map is (may have been in previous town plan, but removed) or where it came from.
- J. Howarth- if a new map is generated, where would it go?

- J. Murray- it could be incorporated into the updated town plan. Jen indicates that the Town Plan may be due for revision in 2021-22. Jen also notes that River Corridor planning could increase State funding to Town for disaster relief.
- J. Howarth agrees to pursue updating Creek map and incorporate River Corridor planning language to be considered in Town Plan update

1:15 CP - Solar power potential maps (Jeff)

- J. Howarth: This comes out of [Act 174](#) - Conservation Commission should help Town improve energy planning standards so that municipal plans “carry greater weight - substantial deference” in energy siting projects. This can also create pathways for State funding support for energy development on lands that may be more expensive to develop economically.
- One part of this is to create solar potential maps as a tool to assure that local energy production and conservation goals can be mutually achieved. After removing lands for conservation value from energy development, is there still sufficient land to meet local energy production goals?
- Addison County Regional Planning Commission has [done some work on this](#) - can we build on and improve on this work?
- A. L’Roe will send out the Middlebury energy production data
- J. Howarth showed two maps of potential solar energy production in Middlebury. He used high-resolution LIDAR data (both with trees and bare ground) in a standard GIS Solar Analysis. Would like to move towards a preferred siting map for energy plan.
- J. Murray- would be great to work with Energy Committee through Planning Commission to get Energy Plan completed next Spring- would be good to get it done for next Town Plan revision.

1:25 Set Next Agenda & Meeting Date: **October 19th- 12 to 1:30pm**

1:30 Adjourn

Motion: A. L’Roe, Second: M. Anderson

Unanimously Approved