

TOWN OF MIDDLEBURY CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Monday, November 16, 2020

12:00 – 1:30 PM

Join by Web <https://middlebury.zoom.us/j/91880153974>

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MINUTES

(Approved at December 21, 2020 meeting)

Attending: Jeff Howarth, Chris Brooks, Judy Wiger-Grohs, Carl Harden, Andrew L'Roe, Amy Sheldon (Molly Anderson joined partway through)

12:00 Call to Order

12:05 Citizen Comments (None)

12:10 Approval of minutes ([October 19, 2020](#))

Motion to approve: C. Brooks, Second: J. Wiger-Grohs, Unanimously approved

12:15 Staff Updates

- J. Howarth had conversations with Town Planner J. Murray. He was invited to speak with Planning Commission on Thursday (11/19)- Proposes starting with 30 x 30 framework & showing conservation atlas, then will present projects that the Conservation Commission is interested in collaborating with the PC on:

- Flood maps and river corridors
- Preferred energy siting- goes hand in hand with conservation
- Forest blocks and fragmentation
- Strengthening language in town plan, zoning guidelines

- A. Sheldon- please ask about the town Conservation Fund and how the Cons. Comm should make recommendations and provide advice.
- C. Brooks has been reviewing language in Zoning and Town Plan document- would propose stronger conservation-based language (e.g. for aquifer recharge areas). For conditional reviews, after “Shall consider input from...” suggests explicitly adding “Conservation Commission” (in order to formalize relationship)
- The Commission was supportive and J. Howarth said he would make any presentation slides available and report back at the next meeting.

12:20 Commission Member Updates

- J. Wiger-Grohs wanted to know about the quarry in East Middlebury at School House Hill Road
- A.Sheldon-there is ATV use going on at the quarry- she will let someone on the Prudential committee know.
- A. Sheldon-Going to speak with Chris Mattrick from USFS about land acquisition plans, especially with newly fully-funded L&WCF.
- A. Sheldon- received a disappointing response from VTtrans about the airport tree-cutting site visit- 5 people from the state were there, but weren’t very prepared, didn’t have maps or copy of the permit. The Natural Resources Board (NRB) appears to be gutted and VTtrans (especially the aviation arm) isn’t responsive. A. Sheldon may hold hearings during the next legislative session.
- J. Wiger-Grohs- is there someone we can talk to or would it be helpful for us to contact? A. Sheldon said she would let commissioners know.
- J. Wiger-Grohs- contacted airport manager and the state and they indicated that there were no safety violations at the airport since the trees were last cut. Also, the area around the airport is being treated with RoundUp.
- The Department of Public Works is moving from current location to the other side of Route 7.
- The Tree Committee is applying for TD Green Space grant opportunity (Dec 18)- gives preferential treatment to Tree City USA towns (which Middlebury is, and is trying to renew)- for low income areas- looking for suggestions. Green infrastructure, resilience against climate change.
- C. Harden- was walking off the TAM on North Country Trail in Murdock Woods - appears to be build- out of lots- was surprised that it extends into the woods. Commissioners looked at maps and saw that this area is zoned Medium Density Residential, but agreed that zoning areas could continue to be improved and in several areas the TAM could use more protected buffer area.

12:25 Conservation Easements (M.Anderson joined meeting)

- J. Howarth: There was a Cornwall CC webinar with people from MALT, VLT, appraiser last month. The panel was interesting- it was well attended. Talked about some of the costs associated with “donating” a conservation easement (hiring appraiser for before/after appraisals, maintenance- for VLT or MALT stewardship, have to be figured in). Might be an avenue for the Midd Conservation fund to fill the gap. According to the appraiser, Use value Appraisal enrollments were the best deal (in terms of tax savings) for landowners- so appealing that they may not have tax incentives to move into a conservation easement. How do you encourage people in the UVA program to put their land into conservation?
- A. Sheldon- there are a variety of reasons landowners would make the jump to conservation easements. There are UVA programs across most states- some are more financially rewarding.
- J.Howarth- showed map of largest landowners in Middlebury, protected areas. Can we encourage College to protect through easements, especially as related to 30x2030 goals? It would be ideal if we could College could show some leadership, or make a pledge.

12:35 Climate Change Planning, Land Conservation, and College Lands

- Climate Economy Action Center (CEAC)- John Barstow and Lisa Winkler from College have been participating, A. Sheldon is on board and A. L’Roe participates in meetings
- CEAC is finishing up a county-wide GreenHouse Gas inventory, may move forward on a Climate Action Plan. Ideally it would have a strong land use component and involve the Conservation Commission.
- A. Sheldon: We definitely need more understanding of interconnections between land use and climate. The College has been pretty resistant to (donating) conservation easements, so it would be a paradigm shift. It might not make sense to target their lands first- but definitely should be included in recommendations for large landowners.
- Not all easements might be listed on public records, and deed restrictions aren’t always known (e.g. Battell lands)
- C. Brooks- would be in favor of making recommendations for the college to conserve lands with Conservation Easements.
- J. Howarth: The college is on the verge of a “Land Acknowledgement” (for indigenous peoples), but their recent actions don’t necessarily match up or support that, or acknowledge the long history of management actions (e.g. the land where South St. solar facility installation is moving forward appears to have little wetland impact because wetland was previously drained for agriculture). Should assess/acknowledge historical effects of past management actions.
- M. Anderson- it would be worth having a list of actions that the College should be doing

12:55 MCC Goals for next six months

- J. Howarth proposed commission members should set goals for their contributions to CC for May 2021. It would be great to have meetings where people are presenting work on specific tasks/sections- please think about goals and steps and bring your ideas to next meeting

1:20 Set Next Agenda & Meeting Date

December 21, noon-1:30pm

1:30 Adjourn

M.Anderson: motion to adjourn, C. Harden: Second, Unanimously approved