

TOWN OF MIDDLEBURY CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Monday, December 21, 2020

12:00 – 1:30 PM

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

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MINUTES

(Approved at January 18, 2021 meeting)

Attending: Jeff Howarth, Andrew L’Roe, Amy Sheldon, Carol Harden, Judy Wiger-Grohs, Molly Anderson

12: 00 Call to Order

12:05 Citizen Comments

12:10 Approval of minutes ([November 16, 2020](#))-

- Move to approve: J. Wiger-Grohs, Seconded: M. Anderson, Unanimously approved

12:15 Planning Commission update

- On November 19, J.Howarth gave presentation to Middlebury Planning Commission (all but 2 members), they seemed interested in working more together
- Takeaways: they appreciate technical/mapping help, are interested in working on river corridors, preferred energy siting, habitat blocks and connectors
- The PC expressed a lot of appreciation for Scientific input, but may see CC role primarily as technical input (mostly making maps, e.g. scenic views)
- PC had a question about whether Solar Arrays would count as “Protected Land” (JH said generally, No)
- M. Anderson suggested that confusion may have to do with promised plantings, etc.
- Some of the PC interest stems from awareness of Act 171- the Town is required to identify forest blocks and habitat connectors for updating the town plan.

- J. Howarth- would like to start with what the state has done (Blocks and Corridors), and improve it for Middlebury & Champlain Valley specifics (e.g. Clayplain forest, finer scale connectivity)
- J. Howarth will be meeting again with J. Murray after the holidays (in January)

12:20 [Conservation Plan](#) Discussion:

Conservation Goals

- M. Anderson Who is the intended audience? Is Biological Diversity the main goal and does it make sense to include agricultural land, wetlands, etc.?
- J. Howarth- this a framework for Biological Diversity, the First Part of an overall Conservation Plan. That will feed into additional components.
- C. Harden- this is a great starting point and clear piece, are there other voices of working land/farms and should that be a focus?
- J. Wiger-Grohs- municipal committees often do best when given clear evidence and science
- A. Sheldon- it would be good to add other acknowledgements, but need to have a clear and strong voice for natural environments, forest blocks.
- J. Wiger-Grohs: The connection of the plan has to go back to people and their needs.
- A. L'Roe.: Like the approach a lot- would it be possible to add executive summary/bullet points (e.g. Michael Pollan "Rules")? e.g. "Fragment Less, Conserve More, Mostly Clayplain Forest"
- J. Howarth: 50% protected actually isn't that big a number - a little more than 50% of Midd is currently not developed and not agricultural

Conservation Districts

- J. Howarth- the current draft is missing specific target species, the "fine filter"- is that a problem?
- A. L'Roe- thinks that's okay, better to focus on existing and potential habitats/community types since the records are probably not complete and species will hopefully move over time if they have room- maybe prioritize connections between existing areas with known rare/endangered species when we get to that point?
- C. Harden- is there enough natural "Clayplain Forest" left to justify its own category?
- J. Howarth: Not much of it left, but - it would require reconstruction and restoration- e.g. the South St Extension valley which was forested in the 1920's, but subsequently cleared and drained for the fields where the solar field is now proposed.
- A. L'Roe- we might rename "Districts" to something that doesn't connote contiguous geographic areas

- A. Sheldon: Concerns that Vermont Conservation Design doesn't account for any restoration

Protection Criteria

- J. Howarth- the current Protected Lands map was a pain to put together, lots of slivers of properties, unmatched, from different sources. Should legal permanence be a criteria for "protection" level?
- A. Sheldon- Thinks strict protection and areas that could go to that stronger level should be included.
- J. Howarth: 3 levels of protection? Strong, medium, basic
 - 30 x 2030 goal is 30% protected, but 10% in "Strong protection"
 - Protecting areas where natural disturbances can function is important, but not really enough

Conservation Gaps

- J. Howarth: Identified Open "GreenSpace" forested and "Agricultural land" blocks
- Different scenarios- contributions of different paths forward

1:20 Conservation Commissioner updates

- J. Howarth is going to continue working on Conservation Plan and members should follow-up with him with comments and contributions- he would like to have a full draft complete by next meeting

1:25 Set Next Agenda & Meeting Date

18 of January, noon (J. Howarth will send draft on 15th)

1:30 Adjourn

A. Sheldon: Motion to adjourn, A. L'Roe: Second, Unanimously Approved