

TOWN OF MIDDLEBURY CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Monday, March 22, 2021

12:00 – 1:30 PM

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

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**MINUTES**

**(Approved at April 26, 2021 meeting)**

**In Attendance: Jeff Howarth, Andrew L'Roe, Amy Sheldon, Carol Harden**

12:00 Call to Order

12:05 Citizen Comments (None)

12:10 Approval of minutes ([February 2021](#))

**A. Sheldon motion to approve, J. Howarth Second, Vote to approve- Unanimous**

12:15 AVCC microgrant discussion (Website: <https://vtconservation.com/tiny-grants/>)

Midd CC is not currently a member of AVCC (the town was a member until 2017)

A. L'Roe read several of the previous year's funded projects- several were for wildlife cameras to document wildlife corridors and crossings.

Several commission members already have wildlife/trail cameras- We can coordinate on deploying our existing wildlife cameras- maybe in three different areas of Middlebury

If the commission can find determine a good system for uploading/sharing photos, we could put out a request to hunters, other town residents with wildlife cameras. (A. L'Roe could potentially post to Front Porch Forum or printed notice at Field Sports?)

Could explore setting up Google Cloud “bucket” for storage- J. Howarth will investigate cost- could be an AVCC grant funding request if we decide by next meeting.

12:20 Officer updates

J. Howarth will check with Jen Murray to find out if Judy Wiger-Grohs has followed up about resignation and if we need to add another member.

A. L’Roe was asked by CEAC if we wanted to add a listing to their [LiveGreenVT](#) website (at no charge). A. L’Roe will draft a description of the Commission’s work and goals and submit it for listing.

12:30 Dimuzio-VLT project discussion

Al Karnatz joined the meeting- presented Conservation Easement proposal for Dimuzio property on Munger Street/East Munger St. 1 housesite would be allowed, along with farm outbuildings.

There are a couple Ecological Protection zones, around a brook of the Muddy Branch, the easement requires fencing to keep livestock out. Also additional protections for the fragment of remaining Clayplain forest- easement restricts to selective tree cutting, can never be clearcut.

A. L’Roe: This looks like an excellent property for conservation for several reasons and starts to put together a nice block of protected land along the Muddy Brook headwaters in that area. The adjoining property, connecting to the conserved Pominville tract, looks like it would be a logical next piece?

A. Karnatz: It would be difficult for VLT to do that one- it’s harder to protect properties that don’t have farm operations (e.g. are just leased for haying)

Any allowance for Solar energy development? A. Karnatz: VLT easements do allow 1% of land to have solar arrays (that would only be 1-2 acres here, not a large solar project)

J. Howarth- we’ll put together a statement of support for Selectboard for an upcoming meeting. Wording approved by Commission:

**The Middlebury Conservation Commission supports use of the town conservation fund in the amount of \$25,000 to help compensate landowners Hank Dimuzio and Rhonda Roberts for granting a conservation easement to VLT.**

**In addition to protecting agricultural land and statewide prime soils, this property offers protection to wet-Clayplain forest that is currently underrepresented in protected lands of the town and contributes to a block of protected land across two Open Space blocks in the upper watershed of the Muddy Branch of the New Haven River.**

**Motion: A. L'Roe, second J. Howarth, Unanimously approved**

1:00 Energy planning updates

The town invited the Energy Commission to take the lead on a stand-alone Comprehensive Energy Plan (which can be approved separately and referenced by the Town Plan), and included Jeff and Andrew to find out if the Conservation Commission would take part.

J. Howarth: Do we want to pursue this and take part?

A. L'Roe and A. Sheldon agreed that it should be written in a way that meets the state requirements so that it counts for the State and Public Utility Commission, even if the issues of solar/other renewable energy siting are unlikely to come up.

C. Harden- from past conversations it seemed like the Energy Committee was more focused on the other parts of energy planning (quantifying energy use, and not as interested in the siting, but we should stay involved in those conversations, especially in siting and bigger picture

It was agreed that the town should pursue a comprehensive energy plan, and it would be best if the Town Planner and Energy Committee could take the lead with input from relevant stakeholders.

There is a Midd Energy Committee meeting on Wednesday (3/25), so hopefully more will be known after that.

A. L'Roe will follow up with the RPC about whether they could offer any support (mapping, data, templates, etc.)

1:30 Conservation plan discussion

J. Howarth has been working to streamline the plan, making it "Short and Sweet" with 5 main recommendations and a Map Resource.

There is link a link to the online Google Earth Engine map that J. Howarth created- (<https://jhowarth.users.earthengine.app/view/conservation-planning>)

The map allows selecting any parcel in Middlebury (and all of Addison County)- this shows the "Open Space Block" it's in, and a breakdown of natural community types, soil types, and existing protected land in that block.

Those Blocks cross town boundaries to show connectedness to adjoining municipalities and help coordinate efforts.

The tool will help identify areas that should be restored, as well as those that can be protected in current condition.

At the next meeting the Commission can word-smith and finalize the goals and objectives.

1:45 Schedule April meeting

**Monday, April 26th- noon-1:30**

1:50 Adjourn