

TOWN OF MIDDLEBURY CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Monday, April 26, 2021

12:00 – 1:30 PM

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

Join by Phone Dial: +1 646 876 9923. When prompted, enter the meeting ID: 918 8015 3974. This is not a toll free number. Depending on your long-distance plan, charges may apply.

Join by smartphone, tablet or other device Download the Zoom app, which is available from the Google Play Store (for Android devices) or the Apple App Store. When the Zoom app opens, select the option to join meeting and enter the meeting ID: 429149

Password If prompted, enter this six-digit number: 429149

MINUTES

(Approved at May 24, 2021 meeting)

Present: Jeff Howarth, Andrew L'Roe, Chris Brooks, Molly Anderson, Carol Harden, Amy Sheldon

12:00 Call to Order

12:05 Citizen Comments

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

C. Harden: Moved to approve, J. Howarth: seconded, Approved

12:15 Updates on VTrans and VLT projects

J. Howarth- VLT's request for \$25,000 was approved by the Middlebury Selectboard. Project expected to be finalized by 2022, VLT doesn't have any other active projects. VLT waits for landowners to approach them, so there's one potential project, but nothing firm, and primary criteria for conservation is farmland (baseline is amount/% agricultural soils and open area)

VTrans project- J.Howarth shared Act 250 “[FINDINGS OF FACT, CONCLUSIONS OF LAW & ORDER](#)” documentation, which points out some places where language in the Middlebury Town Plan and Zoning in Forest Districts could be made more specific in regards to outside development. Also, because the project site doesn’t show up in the ANR/Conservation By Design’s Forest Block/Connectors map, it wasn’t considered to be a significant landscape feature. The “parcel was not identified as a highest priority or priority area for connectivity.”

12:20 AVCC microgrant: wildlife camera discussion

Several Commission members have put out cameras- J. Howarth has a camera out with landowners’ permission in Middlebury Swamp. Lots of turkey and deer pictures, along with changing floodwater heights. It requires lots of storage for a lot of very similar shots. Tried turning the still shots into a quicktime movie- it’s fun, but takes time and space. Also some privacy issues about putting it on a map and pictures of people if this were to be public-facing.

A. L’Roe- Could this be a good project for Master Naturalist project next year? Might have to decide if we wanted this to be randomly sited/specific to corridors.

C.Harden- could we do something with a student designing a project using artificial intelligence-identification?

J. Howarth- might also be something that students in his class could take on this Fall or as a follow-up independent project in winter.

Commissioners agreed to not pursue the AVCC grant at this time but to continue thinking about and developing a project to identify wildlife corridors and document wildlife use.

12:30 Energy planning discussion

J.Howarth has been to two recent energy commission meetings- there appears to be movement towards forming a steering committee and working towards meeting the Enhanced Energy Plan requirements- are there resources that the RPC could contribute and Conservation Commission could be involved?

A. L’Roe- we could relatively easily prepare draft calculations based on RPC template, and hand off to the Energy Committee and let them refine or come up with better numbers.

C.Harden: Willing to help out with data calculations and preparation

J. Howarth: Willing to help with mapping and spatial analysis.

Commissioners agreed to work on preliminary plan and acreage calculations for a draft to give the Energy Committee for them to refine.

1:00 Conservation plan discussion

J.Howarth- if/when Conservation Commission approves, he would take to Planning Commission, Select Board, and local public feedback within sub-regions of town. Future steps would include working with J. Murray on integration with Town Plan and zoning guidelines.

J.Howarth provided overview of the Plan- identifies four sub-regions (landscapes) based on open space, tree canopy, and environmental conditions. Does not identify specific parcels within these landscapes. Instead, focus on remaining patches of forest and woods and opportunities to grow and connect them through restoration of valley clayplain and floodplain forest conditions. Also includes farmland conservation and recreation (trail system) as conservation goals in landscape regions.

M.Anderson.: Might be helpful to have photos/specific examples paired with the landscape analysis?

A. L'Roe: Maybe as landscape format for some of the pages so those would be across from each other? Is it possible to use a different color (instead of black) for the non-forested communities map?

J.Howarth. Maps in draft are largely screenshots - will do some work to make them more presentation ready and readable after feedback from commission on first drafts. Asks how much detail on methods required for public audience: Does it make sense to shift/move some of the information towards the end of the plan that walks through the thought process?

A.L'Roe: Maybe move to an Appendix that interested folks could reference?

General agreement that yes, better to keep document short and concise

M.Anderson. Would it be helpful to include examples, potential tools like Conservation Easements, toolkit for private landowners

C.Harden. Might be good to have these as a separate project to create a toolkit - something we can take on for the next project.

A. L'Roe- may also be possible to tackle water issues, etc. in future years as we progressively present information to town, Planning Commission, etc.

C. Harden: thinks plan should include conservation goals connected to surface waters, potentially even aquifer.

M. Anderson: agrees. Otter Creek is the heart of Middlebury but we're largely disconnected from it.

J. Howarth- Agreed. Will include surface water component to landscape discussion. Can connect to aquifer in 'mountain forest landscape' section.

J. Howarth - will incorporate feedback and work to complete draft by May so that he can transition out of Chair position and have time to share plan with town committees and staff and develop public outreach projects.

1:25 Schedule May meeting

Noon, Monday, May 24th- last meeting with J. Howarth as Chair, transition to A. L'Roe and C. Harden.

1:30 Adjourn