

Conservation Commission Regular Meeting

MINUTES

DECEMBER 18, 2017

4:05PM – 5:01PM

MIDDLEBURY TOWN OFFICES SMALL MEETING ROOM

TYPE OF MEETING	Monthly Meeting of the Middlebury Conservation Commission
NOTE TAKER	Kemi Fuentes-George
ATTENDEES	Monica Przyperhart, Amy Sheldon, Kemi Fuentes-George, Judy Wiger-Gross, Molly Anderson
ABSENT	Jeff Hovarth, Andrew L'Roe, Terri Arnold (resigned)
STAFF	Jennifer Murray
GUESTS	Lindsay Dreiss

Agenda topics

4:05 – 4:44PM

PROPOSAL FOR STUDENT DRIVEN J-TERM VIEWSHED MAPPING PROJECT

DISCUSSION	
<p>The meeting was called to order at 4:05pm. The first item on the agenda was developing a plan for viewshed mapping.</p> <p>Lindsay Dreiss introduced herself to the group, and said she was attending to listen to the viewshed mapping discussion. She is looking for a student project, and would be interested in ideas from the group. She noted that a student from Middlebury is available to conduct an Independent Study for credit to assist in the viewshed mapping effort. Staff noted that the particulars of the project are still being developed and there is no scope to share yet.</p> <p>Lindsay used the time to talk with members of the conservation commission about possible student projects.</p> <p>Committee members recognize that the scope of the project will depend on what the final use of the viewshed mapping will be. The group identified three possible outcomes/uses for the viewshed mapping: 1) renewable energy siting; 2) zoning review process; 3) setting conservation goals in regards to open space. These goals will help develop methodology to be used in such a map. Once a preliminary map is established, the Conservation Commission would propose field verification from planning commission & public. Amy Sheldon's class had one possible methodology & others are available from Jericho, Williston, etc.</p> <p>Amy felt we could simplify the process by identifying the top 10 viewsheds, and asking participants to evaluate those. Such a map should also be sensitive to time – seasonal changes affect viewshed mapping. The group discussed a student project to develop a survey tool that the group called Field Verification in a Box (from Meeting in a Box). Student could give us a package to continue, once they graduate (so this can continue in the Spring). Methodology should include directions, where you're looking from, distance, etc. Perhaps set up an Instagram to assist the public in contributing viewshed values to this effort. Lindsay likened this to a preference survey. Staff said she could think of ways a field verification/visual preference tool could be a useful conservation planning tool, but not necessarily in creating a viewshed map with zoning implications. Staff felt that in order to be used for zoning purposes, we would need to open the process for public input without pre-selecting views. She suggested a platform more like iNaturalist.</p>	
CONCLUSIONS	
<p>Continue to work with Lindsay to work with a student from Middlebury College to conduct an Independent Study and assist in viewshed mapping. Look into using the "In a Box" platform to assist in gathering public input.</p>	

4:44 – 5:01PM

FOREST RECREATION PLANNING GRANT REVIEW AND POSSIBLE CONSULTANT MEETING

[PRESENTER]

DISCUSSION	
<p>There is a consultant visiting Middlebury on Jan 15 to gather input on forest planning. The Conservation Commission discussed the project in advance of the consultant's visit to develop some input. Meeting with this consultant would help in understanding how to best create proposals for forest recreation and planning in the future. Staff distributed a map and recommendations related to the town forests, taken from Parks and Rec Comprehensive Plans dating to 1978 & 2000. These helped establish some history of ideas on Town forest planning. The potential Consultant will likely be asking to know what uses are appropriate in different town forests & how uses in some areas differ from others – e.g., Means Woods has different purposes from Chipman Hill. Among the possible uses are: Snowshoes, snowmobile, wildflowers, hiking, mountain biking.</p>	

Another issue that has come up is possibly establishing recommendations for camping places in town, both for recreation purposes and to address some of the vulnerable homeless/houseless population in the area. There were several reports from Commission members that homeless people often use forested areas for camping, even though such uses are not currently permitted. As a result of clandestine camping, there is often litter and trash around de facto camping sites. Having some designated areas available for camping might address this.

The Conservation Commission used the Town zoning interactive map viewer to examine the parcel maps, noting the location of surrounding properties not owned by the Town. This clarified that there are possible tensions for encroaching development in forested areas.

CONCLUSIONS	
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Possibly sit in on Steering Committee Jan 15 th meeting to contact their consultant for Forest Recreation Planning.	
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OBSERVERS	No members of the public were present
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ADJOURNMENT	The meeting was adjourned at 5:01pm.
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