

# Conservation Commission Regular Meeting

## MINUTES

JANUARY 15, 2018

4:05PM – 5:30PM

MIDDLEBURY TOWN OFFICES SMALL  
MEETING ROOM

<b>TYPE OF MEETING</b>	Monthly Meeting of the Middlebury Conservation Commission
<b>NOTE TAKER</b>	Kemi Fuentes-George
<b>ATTENDEES</b>	Monica Przyperhart, Jeff Howarth, Kemi Fuentes-George, Judy Wiger-Gross, Andrew L'Roe
<b>ABSENT</b>	Amy Sheldon, Molly Anderson
<b>STAFF</b>	Jennifer Murray
<b>GUESTS</b>	None

### Agenda topics

4:05 – 4:17PM                      OPENING & APPROVAL OF MINUTES AND  
AGENDA

<b>DISCUSSION</b>	
<p>The meeting was called to order at 4:05pm. Quorum was declared. Minutes from the previous meeting were approved with two corrections: "Judy Wiger-Grohs" was misspelled as "Judy Wiger Grosh" and "Jeff Howarth" was misspelled as "Jeff Hovarth." The corrections were noted, and subsequent minutes will reflect this change. We briefly reviewed and approved the agenda.</p>	

4:17 – 4:25PM                      ELECTION OF OFFICERS

<b>DISCUSSION</b>	
<p>We had two nominations and elections for officers of the commission. Kemi Fuentes-George nominated Monica Przyperhart for chair. The motion was seconded by Jeff Howarth, and was passed unanimously. Judy Wiger-Grohs nominated Kemi Fuentes-George for clerk. The motion was seconded by Jeff Howarth, and was passed unanimously. Both offices carry a term limit for 1 year, with elections to be next held on Town Meeting Day of March 2019.</p>	
<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>	
<p>A Chair and Clerk were elected for the conservation commission. Nominations for Vice Chairs deferred until next meeting</p>	

4:25 – 4:55PM                      DEVELOPING ACTION PLAN FOR NEXT STEPS  
FOR ITEMS ON AGENDA: VIEWSHED AND  
COMMUNITY VALUES MAPPING

<b>DISCUSSION</b>	
<p>In moving forward with items on the agenda, we discussed the possibility and viability of using sub-committees to address the tasks that either require specialized attention, or can otherwise be addressed without the entire commission. Monica suggested that we might want, on occasion, subcommittees of 2-3 people. Jennifer noted that subcommittees are not necessary for every item, but they may be helpful for more complex projects. Next step is to develop action items for our agenda for the year. The Community Values Mapping (CVM henceforth) as Monica noted, is essentially the basis for all of our work in giving conservation recommendations. In the past, and in other towns, this was carried out through community forums where community members would examine basic maps of the areas targeted for CVM – that is, maps that show roads, rivers, etc., with minimal superfluous detail.</p> <p>Judy noted that similar processes of public participating in CVM have been carried out in CO, NM, etc., where invited community members would peruse generic maps, put markers or indicate areas of interest, and then having these markers overlaid with recommendations for other community members at the analysis stage.</p> <p>In understanding what role viewshed mapping plays in this scenario, we discussed that there are some similarities with CVM. That is, viewshed mapping can be one value group w/in the CVM, as members of the public might value areas precisely because of their views. (However, viewshed mapping might not capture values such as, e.g., where foraging sites for mushrooms are).</p>	

In response to a question about what the planning commission would need in regards to viewshed mapping, Jennifer Murray noted that it is needed ASAP – in fact, the need for viewshed mapping predates the formation of the conservation commission. Jennifer noted that a consultant could be retained to work on this, but if the interest and capacity exists within the conservation commission that would be great. A subcommittee might be appropriate for fleshing out the scope of work. She noted that both Amy & Lindsey (who was present at last month's commission meeting) had students that had worked on viewshed mapping in the past.

Jeff suggested that he would be interested in working on viewshed mapping as part of a subcommittee. Jennifer suggested Amy as co-member on subcommittee, which would have to be raised with her later. Jeff suggested that we start viewshed mapping with a basic question about visibility, and then work on imputing values later. In other words, the initial purpose of viewshed mapping would be to track areas of visible aesthetic interest, find out what is visible, and whether/how energy sitings (solar panels, wind farms) would affect visibility. He explained that there are two questions to address in viewshed mapping, one controversial, the other not. The uncontroversial question is: "Yes or no – is it visible?" The controversy is: "do you like what you see?" Once visibility has been mapped, subsequent iterations of the viewshed mapping process will build on that complexity to add community aesthetic values.

Jen will meet w/ planners to see if there are smaller pieces from mapping that can be done on CC.

Andrew asked whether the student working on this be able to present at the conservation commission. Jeff noted that it was unlikely – J-Term is too short, the process can be difficult to break down, and students can easily get side-tracked in other areas of interest. Kemi asked a question of clarification about the methodology used by the student in the initial phase. Jeff explained that the student was going to use an elevation model of the terrain, and run an analysis to determine what was visible from selected points. Kemi asked what was the length in km of visibility of model? Jeff pointed out that the current model could extrapolate visibility to the curvature of the horizon, and could be modified as needed. The model is GIS based & is, however, dependent on validity of GIS model.

Once the model of viewshed mapping was completed, then we could propose a public process & adapt the baseline map to information given from public.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The viewshed mapping sequence is tentatively established as follows: first, with student help, there will be a baseline map using GIS to determine visibility from different points in Middlebury. Move forward w/ Lindsey's student, and headed by a subcommittee tentatively comprised of Jeff Howarth and Amy Sheldon (assuming she expresses interest once contacted). Jennifer will look into methods used in other towns for converting this into a community viewshed map and report back to Conservation Commission if it is something they might be able to help with.

4:55 – 4:57PM

#### TOWN FOREST PLANNING

#### DISCUSSION

Jennifer noted that a consultant is scheduled to arrive in Middlebury on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January to start forest walks & then meet with the Steering Committee in reporting. Members of the Conservation Commission would be welcome to attend, as it's open to the public. Monica asked whether we should we bring a unified message or set of questions for the consultant, but Jennifer stated that based on the comments the conservation commission had last time, it sounds like it would be just as useful to provide individual comments.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Conservation commission members are invited to attend the Steering Committee meeting scheduled for the 29<sup>th</sup> of January from 6:00 – 8:00, and bring questions/comments.

4:57 – 5:29PM

#### NATURAL RESOURCES INVENTORY AND COMMUNITY VALUES MAPPING

#### DISCUSSION

Jennifer noted that, in addition to a CVM, the planning commission could use a natural resources inventory. She clarified that there is some money earmarked in budget for consultant-related tasks in this endeavor. Monica asked a question for clarification: What type of inventory is Jen looking for? What do we know & where holes are?

Jennifer noted that this inventory would probably start with wetlands & vernal pools – they tend to be the most unreliably mapped & most frequently exposed to anthropogenic stress. Jennifer noted that she was not sure if a subcommittee was appropriate for this task, but suggested that Andrew L'Roe may want to take the lead, as this is his area of expertise. Monica then asked Andrew to gather resources to start a possible Natural Resources Inventory. Jeff noted he has some material on natural resources that Amy used earlier. Andrew stated that he would likely be able to report back to the committee in February or March, depending on what the teaching schedule was like at Middlebury College.

In discussing the CVM, Monica presented a Community Values Map drawn from research done in Cornwall. This map was drawn in part from asking respondents questions about pre-determined categories of values (e.g., locations of hunting/fishing areas), as well as allowing respondents to invent their own categories of values. As indicated on the map, these values were then collated, and overlaid into a heat-map showing the community values of the town. Another map was drawn from school respondents, but Monica noted that Cornwall was still deciding how to use the data drawn from schools.

In the interest of conservation, this map was then used to compare w/ ecological data gathered through a natural resources inventory & triangulated upon the sites of most ecologically important places. In practice, this helped in Cornwall to figure out which projects to

work on – corridors, endangered species, etc. Jennifer noted that she had participated in a Community Values Mapping project in Jericho, where public provided their input on paper maps & then compared to existing sensitive habitat data layers mapped in GIS. They were pleased to see a correlation- it indicated that the sensitive habitat areas they were seeking to protect were also areas that the community valued. Jennifer noted that in our proposed CVM we might use a site like iNaturalist to further engage the public, as people enjoy reporting wildlife sightings so it involves them in the project.

Designing good outreach to be as representative as possible is going to be crucial. E.g., the Cornwall map was drawn from data gathered by 63 respondents, and we may want a larger share of our population involved. The next step will likely be brainstorming a methodology for how to carry out surveys of public attitudes, and encourage public participation.

**CONCLUSIONS**

A next and important step on the agenda is for the conservation commission to start developing a clear methodology & timeline for conducting a CVM. We agreed that the next two meetings could focus on brainstorming ways to carry out a Natural Resources inventory & CVM. Monica would be willing to present some examples of CVM methodology at the next meeting.

5:29 – 5:30PM

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**DISCUSSION**

There was no other business.

**OBSERVERS**

No members of the public were present

**ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30pm.