

## Minutes of Conservation Commission Monthly Meeting

December 17, 2018

Minutes recorded by Jeff Howarth

**Present:** Monica, Andrew, Amy, Molly, Kemi, Jeff

**Absent:** Judy (tried to attend via phone connection but didn't work), Jennifer

4:10

### CALL TO ORDER

Plan for organizing meetings in the future. Share responsibilities for taking minutes. Jeff will take minutes today. Monica will take responsibility for setting the agenda. Discussion about confirming attendance and participation in future meetings and projects. Also discussion about establishing meeting norms.

Agreed to table approval of minutes for November meeting until our next meeting in order to accommodate and review changes. Jeff will update draft minutes and circulate prior to January meeting.

Agreed to table discussion of meeting schedule, because Molly was running late to this meeting.

Judy tries to participate in meeting via phone but there is a poor connection and so signs off.

4:25

### UPDATE ON CORNWALL SWAMP

Monica and Andrew provided update on proposal to change wetland classification of Cornwall Swamp. There is a proposal for Conservation Commissions of multiple towns to work together to reclassify entire Otter Creek wetlands complex as Class 1 wetland. Monica and Andrew attended meeting in Cornwall this past month. Currently, the wetlands are Class 2. Andrew distributes info on Class distinctions and maps that show entire Otter Creek wetlands system and detail of lands in Middlebury. Jeff asks: What are impacts to agriculture? Monica: not clear, but might not be much, as there may be exemptions for pre-existing use, but all of this is very preliminary. Andrew: meeting organizers want to know if we want to be involved, at this point, this largely means being kept in the loop. Monica: first steps would be to discuss with landowners about their view and concerns with the project. Kemi: what kind of land uses were connected to people who have been in favor of changing classification in other cases? Monica – good question. Might be fallow ag and forestry, but would be good to investigate.

**AGREEMENT:** we should continue to be involved in this discussion and members of Midd CC should participate in future meetings.

Andrew is interested in being involved.

4:40

### UPDATE ON MAPS

Jeff presents some of the mapping work that he's completed. He notes that we've been focused on the need to collect new data in order to pursue conservation goals. He suggests that we should also be thinking about how to make data that we already have more informative. He showed current maps that are included in the Town Plan and highlighted

two maps: one shows parcels and land use zones, the other shows population density. He suggested these could be made more informative and relevant for thinking about conservation. He showed some layers in a GIS that he's been working on. He began with a layer that shows parcels that are color-coded by parcel size. He then showed how land zone categories could be displayed as masks in order to highlight patterns of parcel density in different zoning categories. He compared densities in High and Medium Density residential to Agricultural/Low Density Districts in order to highlight that there are regions in the Agricultural District that have densities that are comparable to residential districts. He asked if we needed to consider the problems for conservation that come from conflating these two land uses (Agricultural and Low Density residential) in a single zoning category.

He then showed how maps could be used to compare changes in zoning districts (in the last ten years) to explore two general questions: (1) what categories have gained land at the expense of other categories? (2) what categories have lost land for the benefit of other categories? Amy stated these relationships were not causal because they were not intentional "swaps."

Finally, Jeff suggested that conservation in Middlebury was analogous to island biogeography where we have islands of Forest reserves surrounded by a rising sea of residential and developed land. A key question is how this landscape affects movement between the islands. He suggested that the Agricultural/Low Density district represents a transitional space with an uncertain future. He showed a "build out" map that depicted parcel sizes in the Agricultural/Low Density District that would be allowable given current language in the Town Plan (Section 620, Schedule A). He highlighted changes in the Muddy Branch region northeast of Chipman Hill. He cautioned that this product was rudimentary, because the Plan language ties the ability to subdivide land to the date of the parcel and he didn't have access to this information.

**AGREEMENT:** the maps are helpful for our discussions and should be revisited in future meeting.

For the sake of time, the group transitioned to the next item on the agenda.

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5:00

## **FUTURE PROJECTS**

Molly suggested a framework for thinking about projects based on three categories: awareness building, individual action tasks, collective actions. Monica: can everyone present one thing that they're interested in working on? Andrew: Class 1 wetlands. Amy: conservation plan – list of parcels to pursue by priority. She's done this for Burlington and they are using her recommendations. Her approach compares soil types to natural community types. Given what has already been preserved, she recommends places that should be prioritized. She finds that often conserved lands are all the same type of community, and her approach helps diversify reserves. Andrew: what's the difference between a conservation plan and an open space plan? Amy: same thing, maybe different urban/rural context. Molly: likes this idea. Molly also interested in the "insect apocalypse." Would like to do awareness building, letting people know how they might encourage insect diversity on their properties. Amy glad she's interested in this. Kemi interested in community values mapping (awareness building). Jeff interested in working with other Commission members on maps that can help them on their projects. Interested in working with Andrew on improving and expanding wetlands maps. Also interested in Amy's approach to developing conservation plan with priority lands. Jeff also working toward combining teaching with some commission activities. Amy supportive of this as long as it doesn't compromise progress. Jeff agrees. Monica interested in awareness building of

playing field in conservation. Kemi also suggests it would be good to develop a public presentation – winter version of walks and talks – and encourages Jeff to consider presenting maps there.

**Agreement: these are good projects to pursue.**

Discussion shifts to plan moving forward. Amy: how does this relate back to Jennifer’s list? What’s still needed on list? What’s being tackled with outside help? Have consultants been hired for any of this work? Will we consult on these hires in the future?

Monica wraps up discussion by asking members which projects they would like to work on moving forward. **We agree on the following:** Amy: conservation plan. Andrew: wetlands. Jeff: collaborate on maps. Kemi: local playing field and community values mapping. Monica: community values mapping and local playing field. Monica also indicates that she thinks Judy would like to work on community values mapping. Molly: conservation plan.

Amy encourages Jeff to give a presentation on land use change for public or other audience. Jeff offers to present a more polished narrative at next meeting for feedback. **Other members agree.**

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5:25

**FUTURE BUSINESS**

Kemi: starting in spring semester (Feb), will be teaching until 4:15pm on Mondays. Can we move meeting start to 4:30? Jeff has same conflict. Other members seem open to moving meeting time to 4:30. Should be discussed at next meeting along with meeting date. Also will discuss the question of whether or not we need to establish formal meeting norms.

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5:40

The meeting is adjourned.