

TOWN OF MIDDLEBURY CONSERVATION COMMISSION
Rotary Small Meeting Room, First Floor
Municipal Office Building
77 Main Street, Middlebury

Wednesday, MAY 29, 2019 4:30 – 6:00 PM

Draft

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| Members Present: | Monica Przyperhart, Judy Wiger-Grohs, Molly Anderson, Jeff Howarth, Amy Sheldon, Kemi Fuentes-George |
| Members Absent: | Andrew L'Roe |
| Staff Present: | Jennifer Murray |
| Others Present: | |

I. Call to Order 4:35

II. Visit from Jennifer Murray and Michael Lew-Smith (Arrowwood Environmental)

- Michael hopes that the inventory can be a living document. They have developed a method that seems to work and have worked with several other towns.
- They start by delineating developed areas and road, then map wetlands, then natural communities which includes a map of ag lands. This provides a detailed map showing Land Cover class and natural community determination. Then they look at areas of wildlife habitat (core forest) and detailed info about what's in the habitat.
- How does this process intersect with ANR's maps? Much of the data was developed on a statewide scale at the 100-meter scale. Wetlands are sometimes out of place and misses a lot. Arrowwood provides more detailed fine-grain maps.
- Arrowwood is just starting for Middlebury; it's spread out over 5 years due to finances (\$3K/year). About 1/3 of the budget is for field inventory. They have finished the wetland remote mapping. So now they have a digital map of developed areas and wetlands. Natural communities, ag land and wildlife habitat haven't been added in yet.
- Michael wants to know what kind of end product they want. Jen thinks CC's contributions would come most in Years 3, 4 and 5. For Comprehensive Plan, Jen wants to know where wetlands lie.
- Kemi asks about level of disturbance. Anything on VT wetlands map is likely to be Class II; rules say you need a state ecologist to do a site visit and it can't be determined remotely. Each wetland is assigned a preliminary natural community. However, agricultural wetlands (hayfield or pasture) would revert to wetlands; they are often determined to be Class III.
- How much field verification do they do? They want to investigate any areas that might have rare species, try to get representative sites. For wildlife, they look for crossings.
- What methods do they use for wetland mapping? Stereoscopic photos. Ortho-imagery based on color infrared photos from around 2010, NAP maps. Digital elevation models. NRCS soil maps (although these are pretty rough). VT Significant Wetlands Map. Natural Heritage data.
- Do they get an accuracy assessment when they do site visits? They do public access surveys, driving roads and trails. They mark wetlands but it's not always clear. Lew-Smith marks these as potential wetlands with annotation.
- How will this be used? Monica- will contribute to the Conservation Plan/Open-Space Plan.

- Concerns with private land-owners about how their land is listed? Michael says some people will say they don't want anyone on their land, but they may still have regulated wetlands and anybody who tampers with them needs to have a permit. Arrowwood won't do field visits to any site where land-owner resists. ConComm members can help by submitting information about friends who wouldn't mind field verification.
- If we want to do field verification, we don't need state certification. Arrowwood has done citizen training in the past. Cornwall had a NR inventory; Marc Lapin had additional knowledge and worked with Monica to field-verify for town zoning. Wetland map needs to be put in a map that the Planning Commission is comfortable with.
- Field verification by Arrowwood of wetlands maps will be this summer; most from public access routes. They want to verify 10 sites, but probably won't get permission for more than 5 or so. Planning office is conducting outreach to property owners. However, a wetland biologist would still need to investigate before any development.
- Michael asks if they can use Amy's natural communities maps from 2008-2010 (existing vegetation). Visual 1:1000 of what was there, thinking about natural communities that were here before people based on soil maps. Amy has finished data. it would be interesting to see how vegetation has changed in last 9 years. Jeff has also done mapping.
- Jeff asks whether Planning Commission will accept data from others outside Arrowwood (e.g., from Conservation Commission). Any changes need to be documented.
- Middlebury regulates within Class III wetlands; Jen says it has very stringent guidelines compared to other towns.
- Monica notes that surrounding towns want to do citizen science wildlife tracking. Wildlife corridors need to be updated, so that may be a potential task for the CC.

III. Approval of minutes

- Motion to approve from Judy, seconded by Jeff. Unanimous approval.

IV. Ongoing Business:

A) Otter Creek Wetlands Potential Reclassification: Timeline is very rushed, and some towns aren't able to comply. For us (Midd ConComm) to be part of this process, we need to bring it to our Select Board and determine whether we should be working on this. Zapata Courage is applying for a grant for improved wetland mapping of the Otter Creek Wetlands Complex. Jen hopes that there's a regional consortium formed to work on this. AmeriCorps staffer (Matt Lacey) is working for both TNC and NRC. We can't really submit suggestions for a revised timeline until we've heard from the Select Board. A town can petition for Class I reclassification, but it has to go to the legislature. Cornwall is doing a public meeting for people who have property in the OCW and abutters in the 100' buffer. Residents can go to any town meeting. Middlebury has a lot of acreage that's currently in agriculture, so therefore exempt. Some land is also in conservation easements (MALT, UVA Program, cadastre conservation program).

Maybe we should invite landowners to a public meeting before saying which parts should be in and out. A biologist can say which areas are contiguous and functioning as part of OCW, and how widening the buffer could help farmers meet water quality standards. If land goes out of ag, farmers can't cut it back.

We need to get permission from Select Board to send letters to landowners and abutters. Before doing this, we need to meet with Kathleen with a proposal that includes which landowners are involved and what we want from them. Who are the other project partners? How will the data be used?

What happens next?

- Monica and Andrew will prepare a one-pager for us describing reclassification.
- Monica and Andrew tell OCW group that we can't meet the proposed timelines but want to be part of the project.
- Andrew will check into making this project a Regional Planning project
- Jeff will ask Marc about meeting on June 10 or 11 and explain that the ConComm wants to know which areas are worth including from an ecologist view. What's the difference and benefits between 100' and 50' buffers?

VIII. Next Meeting Agenda & Meeting Date

- Review role of Chair
- Election of officers
- Setting work plan for the year
- Set up a time for a pollinator walk
- Next meeting at Town Hall on June 24, 2019 4:30pm

Meeting adjourned at 6:18pm on a motion by Judy Wiger-Grohs, seconded by Jeff Howarth and approved by all.