

**CONSERVATION COMMISSION  
DRAFT MINUTES  
January 21, 2015**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Byron Quinn, Alan Willard, Cyndy Kozara, Lynn Peterson  
**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Lea Kachadorian, Al Alessi, One Vacancy  
**OTHERS PRESENT:** Michael Brands

**I. OPENING OF MEETING**

Chair Quinn opened the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

**II. MINUTES**

The minutes of December 17, 2014 were approved as submitted.

**III. NEW BUSINESS**

**A. Riparian Buffer Handout**

Ms. Kozara distributed a handout on riparian buffers for distribution at the February 28, 2015 Town Meeting. The handout is a compilation of photos showing various riparian buffers in different states of health. The main message of the handout is replant/plant your riparian buffer. Contact Mr. Kasden, at the Ottawaquechee Natural Resources Conservation District, to source free trees and labor for riparian buffers.

The ONRCD program is also noted in the CC's Annual report. The Town Planner will add the Kasden contact information to the CC report.

Ms. Kosara will adjust the color of the fonts to make the lettering standout better. A final copy will be sent to the Town Planner for copying and placement at the Town Meeting.

**B. 2014 Conservation Commission Annual Report**

The Town Planner discussed the 2014 Conservation Commission Annual Report with the CC. A draft version was emailed earlier in the week. The report lists the various activities of the CC over the course of the year. Invited speakers is one of the highlighted items. The Town Planner would like to publicize the speakers to enable participation by the general public. Agendas are now posted in three public spaces. This may help improve public attendance at meetings. Also noted in the report is the long term vacancy which has existed for over a year now. The CC agreed with the content of the report. Mr. Kasden's contact information as noted above will be added.

One of last year's speakers was David Sleeper of the Hubbard Brook Foundation. Mr. Peterson indicated Mr. Sleeper is anxious to work with the CC. He would like to hold a meeting with the CC and other like minded individuals to discuss conservation related items where the two groups could work together. A second thought is to host a key note lecture at the Billings Farm and Museum with multiple sponsors such as the CC, the foundation, and other organizations. Chair Quinn mentioned Trout Unlimited could be a potential sponsor as well. Mr. Peterson will remain in contact with Mr. Sleeper.

### **C. VT Vernal Pool Project**

The Town Planner discussed the Vermont Vernal Pool Project completed by Vermont Eco Studies and Arrowwood in 2013. The project did a stereo orthoscopic study of the entire state in a search for vernal pools. The study used a similar methodology that Arrowwood had used in Woodstock's 2003 Wetland Study.

A more advanced methodology is "LiDAR", a process using laser technology and fly overs to map topography. The resulting highly detailed 3-D images would reveal the smallish (0.10 acre average size) concavities that may or not be vernal pools. This would be a future process as there is no current funding available for this technology.

The vernal pool study revealed an additional 33 vernal pools in Woodstock. A study map was compared to the current Woodstock Critical Areas map. Twenty-five of the 33 study vernal pools have not yet been confirmed. The pools need ground-truthing, this requires an expert and a site visit to each area.

The CC stated strong interest in completion of the project via the onsite confirmation process. Vernal pools are most visible directly after snow melt and generally last a month or so, hence the name vernal pool.

The process would require finding and contacting landowners for permission to walk on their property, visiting the site with an expert, filling out the supplied verification form, and then adding the confirmed pools to the Town's official Critical Areas map.

The Town Planner will contact Vermont EcoStudies to start the process.

One difficulty with the process is that it does not identify vernal pools which are located under conifer trees. This is an ongoing problem, as numerous wetlands remain unmapped due to their location under conifers. The Town Planner suggested amendment of the regulations to allow review of the wetlands and vernal pools that are not yet mapped.

### **D. Riparian Buffer /Wetland Items**

The Town Planner noted there are two ongoing enforcement issues whereby owners have done work within either a riparian buffer or a wetland that still need to go through the permit process. Both are on hold and will be reviewed in early spring once the snow melts as site visits will be required.

The Dugan appeal case is still winding its way through the legal system. The owner received a permit and built a stone terrace with a fire pit within the riparian buffer. The property is located along the Kedron Brook at the corner of Elm and Pleasant street. The neighbors desire removal of the stone terrace. It appears the judge may ask for a rehearing on the issue. A final court decision is expected within a month or so.

The Town and Village Zoning Regulations are about to be rewritten. Both sets of regulations regarding riparian buffers were written before Tropical Irene. Tropical Storm Irene has increased State and local focus on the benefits of riparian buffers.

The riparian regulations for the Village are somewhat different than those written for the Town in that the majority of the riparian buffer within the Village is lawn area. This issue makes it difficult from a political point of view. The preferred scenario is for all riparian buffers to be naturally vegetated. However, very few if any landowners would be willing to give up their river front lawns.

An additional issue is what is actually allowed in a riparian buffer. Are stone walks and terraces allowed even if they occupy less than 5% of the total buffer area? The impending Dugan court decision, mentioned above, may shed additional light on the matter as well.

Although all might agree chemical use (pesticides, herbicides, etc.) within the riparian buffer is a bad thing and should be prohibited, the enforcement of such would be difficult. However, restricting chemical use within the regulations may help educate landowners.

Mr. Willard mentioned that riparian buffers also serve to protect safe drinking water in addition to stabilizing river and stream banks.

Ms. Kozara suggested contacting two State employees, Marie Caduto and Todd Menees for help in the rewrite process.

The Town Planner will also contact both the Agency of Natural Resources and the Vermont League of Cities and Towns for additional information that may be of help in the rewrite.

**V. NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting is scheduled for February 18, 2015. The Town Planner will not be able to attend the March 18 meeting. After discussion, the CC agreed to cancel the March meeting.

**VI. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Submitted by:

Michael Brands, AICP  
Town Planner