

**CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MINUTES
January 17, 2018**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Byron Quinn, Bo Gibbs, Lynn Peterson, Bethany Powers, Cyndy Kozara

MEMBERS ABSENT: Al Alessi, Lea Kachadorian

OTHERS PRESENT: Michael Brands

I. OPENING OF MEETING

Chair Quinn opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

II. MINUTES

The December 20, 2017 minutes were approved as submitted.

III. NEW BUSINESS

A. 6 River Street

The Town Planner did a brief review of a home proposed to be built at 6 River Street. The home would be constructed within the 100' riparian buffer along the Ottauquechee River. Zoning permit V-3170-15 granted a variance to allow a reduction of the required 100' buffer area to 55' on the west side of the property. A straight line was drawn from the 55' spot on the west side to the 100' spot on the east side. The home would not be built any closer to the river than the line allows. There would be no riparian vegetation removed in the construction of the new home. After home is built the owners hope to add to the landscaping of the property. Should there be any work done in the riparian area, a hearing may be necessary.

B. Forest Blocks and Wildlife Connectivity - Town Plan Mandate

The Town Planner showed the CC a series of maps, which had been emailed in advance, of potential forest blocks and wildlife connectivity.

The State has a mandate to include a discussion of forest blocks and wildlife habitat connectivity in the adoption of town plans after January 1, 2018. The Planning Commission hopes to adopt an enhanced energy chapter to the town plan later this year. In order to do so, the forest and wildlife component are required. The current Natural Elements chapter does have a good discussion of these components, but it is not as detailed as the State would like. Tunbridge, Vermont was one of the first towns to adopt the forest and connectivity language. This will be used as a model. The Woodstock

Town Zoning Regulations includes a 28 acre Forestry district. The CC has been working on the four corners connectivity project (Plymouth, Bridgewater, Reading and Woodstock) and therefore has a good understanding of the issue.

Two main designations are required. Core forests, highest priority and priority are required to be mapped for wildlife habitat. Additionally, connectivity blocks which show where wildlife is able to travel between towns is required. Most important is inter-town connections.

The intent is create a wildlife corridor throughout the entire State and region. Pete Fellows has a map showing corridors connecting the entire Northeastern US with the Gaspé Peninsula in Canada. As global warming becomes more of an issue, wildlife will tend to migrate north to more appropriate temperate areas. The map will be forwarded to CC members.

The Town of Woodstock has a large amount of land covered with forests. Over 80% of Woodstock land is enrolled in current use or is protected via State or federal ownership. There are 13,374 acres enrolled in current use, the solid majority of which is forest land.

For the Town Plan, the forest areas need to be blocked out and noted as forests. A second step may be to rezone some of these forested areas to assure future protection.

The connectivity issue is slightly more complicated. A map is required showing potential connectivity with neighboring towns. The State has a good start on this with a state-wide map. The four corner area is the most promising area as it connects with the Green Mountain ridge that connects Massachusetts to Canada. The eastern connections to Hartford and Hartland run into more developed areas that are less conducive to wildlife migration.

C. Map of Potential Alternative Energy for Town Plan

The Town Planner presented a map, prepared by Pete Fellows, that combines the potential alternative energy sites with the scenic viewshed study maps that had been completed a number of years back. The scenic viewshed study attempted to add visible properties (from town and State roads) which are sited just below the Scenic Ridgeline zones to a map. They would then be reviewed in a more moderate version of the SR regulations.

To enable municipal involvement in the Public Service Board's (PSB) review of alternative energy projects (Act 249), mainly solar farms in our case, an Enhanced Energy chapter is required for the Town Plan. A major component of the chapter is a map showing realistic potential locations for solar farms.

The PC agreed a good way to map potential alternative energy sites was to remove those that are highly visible. Mr. Fellows's map includes the following. The yellow overlay notes areas viewable from public roads. Green cross hatched areas are sites that contain more than five acres, are more than 500' from the nearest public road and show a good potential for harvesting solar energy. Additionally, electric transmission lines are shown in purple and home sites are shown as gray dots.

The intent is to show 5 acre parcels with solar potential, that are 500' from the nearest road and that can be connected to the electric grid. After the map is produced, it will require approval from the PSB before Act 249 participation would be allowed.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

A. Roadside Invasives Workshop

At the last meeting, the CC agreed to do a roadside invasives workshop in early spring. After discussion, the CC decided April would be a better date for the workshop as it allows more time for preparation and is closer to the actual date invasives start to grow. Ms. Gibbs suggested a work session as well be included, whereby residents and CC members can go out in the field to both identify invasives and to work on their removal. It would be good to find a town owned property for this purpose.

The Town Planner suggested holding an indoor education event at the regular April 18, meeting which could be followed by an April 21 Saturday work session.

A lot of work will be required to organize this event. Speakers and participants need to be invited. Articles and notices need to be written and published. Digital media needs to be involved.

B. Sequestered Carbon via Forestry

Mr. Peterson gave an update on the Carbon Sequestration for Forests project, he and Zach Ralph, Sustainable Woodstock, are working on.

This Saturday January 20th at 1:30 pm a class is being offered at the Marsh Billings NPS forestry building. Classes will be held at this site on each 3rd Saturday of the month.

Mr. Peterson stated the National Academy of Sciences continues to publish many good and interesting articles on the subject as part of their global warming education series.

Over 300 places in the US are managing carbon storage within their forests.

Once governments start adopting a carbon tax, carbon storage will grow exponentially. However, the practice has been off to a slow to start in Vermont. Mr. Peterson noted that his forester, Pat Bartlett, manages over 500 forested properties. However, his is the only one of the 500 that includes a carbon storage component within his forest plan.

Hopefully, the carbon storage classes will generate more interest for local forest owners.

C. High Meadows Grant Update

Last month, Mr. Storace, TRORC Planner, gave a brief presentation on the recently awarded High Meadows grant which funds an 18 month project to facilitate water resiliency events within the Ottauquechee River watershed.

The Town Planner read an email from Mr. Storace noting progress taken thus far. He stated that he and Sue Greenall, Windsor County Extension agent are generating a one-page document (with an associated presentation) for an upcoming Woodstock Rotary meeting. The intent is to show the economic benefits and potential negatives of flooding and associated erosion of riparian buffer plantings and thoughtful river stewardship.

Mr. Storace met with the Hartland Conservation Commission. They've agreed to do a mailing to landowners that would state current buffer regulations, educate them on the benefits of a viable riparian buffer and indicate where appropriate riparian vegetation can be obtained.

The CC agreed this would also be a great project for Woodstock.

The Town Planner showed a photograph of last week's ice flows as it impacted the Pearson riparian zone. Lack of mature trees along the river bank allowed the river ice flow to enter the field.

V. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for February 21, 2018.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Submitted by,

Michael Brands, AICP
Town Planner