

Champlain Valley Conservation Partnership Meeting
Wednesday, February 2, 2020; 2:30 PM
Champlain Room, City of South Burlington City Hall

Attendees: Ashley Parker, SB Project Manager; Melinda Scott, Williston Conservation Planner; Alex Weinhagen, Hinesburg Director of Planning & Zoning; Dean Pierce, Shelburne Director of Planning & Zoning; Sarah Dopp, President South Burlington Land Trust; Gail Albert, Shelburne Natural Resources & Conservation Committee; Abel Russ, St. George Development Review Board; Bill Labich, Highstead Foundation/RCP Network

Absent: Sarah Gentry Tischler, St. George Selectboard; Melanie Needle, Senior Planner, Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission; Don Rendall, Shelburne Natural Resources & Conservation Committee; Bob Hyams, Hinesburg Conservation Commission; Lisa Kingsbury, UVM Planning Services; Kevin Dorn, City Manager, City of South Burlington; Kate Kelly, Hinesburg Conservation Commission; Holly Rees, Director of Recreation & Parks, South Burlington

Meeting began at approximately 2:35 PM.

Welcome and Round of introductions.

Changes or additions to Agenda –

There were no changes/additions to the agenda.

Consideration of Minutes from Previous Meeting –

The minutes from the January 22, 2020, meeting were reviewed. There were a few changes suggested. The changes were made and the minutes were accepted as amended.

Partner News and/or Updates –

Shelburne announced that there is a new DRB coordinator.

South Burlington updated the partners on the status of the City's Natural Resources Committee. City Council recently adopted a new charge for the Committee which also resulted in a new name – they are now the Natural Resources & Conservation Committee. Ashley adapted the charge based on language found in Shelburne's charge for their Natural Resources & Conservation Committee. The Committee is still down members, and the Council hopes to appoint enough to get them meeting again soon.

The South Burlington Land Trust reported that the City's Planning Commission has reviewed the commissioned Arrowwood habitat block assessment report. It acknowledged that habitat blocks do cross into neighboring municipal lands, and did some mapping to take an initial look at this concept.

Hinesburg relayed that they might have a natural resource inventory update next month.

Shelburne also mentioned that folks should take a look at the current I-89 transportation study. It's supposed to take a look at land use changes and impacts to the VT 116 corridor. There could be potential impacts to the most rural part of Shelburne and South Burlington's southeast quadrant.

Introduction of Bill Labich & Discussion re: RCP Network –

Bill introduced himself and what his role is at the Highstead Foundation in regards to the RCP Network.

The Highstead Foundation doesn't charge for services. It works to raise money for RCPs to do work. Bill said that the model of the RCP is simple, easy to do, and can be applied to any landscape. You don't need to create smaller entities to do the same work. Join together to ease the burden on all. The first RCPs had a similar vision that they co-owned their landscape and all wanted to work towards conservation of that landscape.

RCPs are capable of accomplishing exciting things when they form. He has noticed that if RCPs don't have any structure then they have a harder time gathering momentum. The more successful RCPs have: regularly scheduled meetings, realizing their mission in some way, there is a relationship between a host partner territory and the rest of the region.

Identifying your conservation strategies on a map is a big task. Highstead is capable of identifying potential funding sources to assist the CVCP in pursuing its mission. It's important to remember to use the partnership to innovate. The point of the RCP is not to endure. It's a tool to achieve a result that you want. You need to have capacity to do new things.

The RCP Network makes it easier to share information and resources. It can help RCPs achieve their mission at a landscape scale. It can also provide inspiration and support to other bodies interested in forming and moving. The network provides a biannual survey to learn from RCPs, and then they use that information to help plan their services for the next year. Highstead is able to take more risks financially on behalf of the whole better than others.

Cornell and Audubon are teaming up on a Northeast Bird Habitat Conservation initiative. They are looking to see if there is a way to collaborate with RCPs to increase bird habitat. There might be an opportunity to get all Audubon programs to talk across boundaries.

There is also a partnership with NPS to look at preserving landscape surrounding the AT. There are monthly coordinator calls, and an opportunity to learn from others engaged in this work.

Bill suggested that the CVCP can get involved by sharing a shapefile that highlights the extent of the partnership (its boundary). The network also has a website for communication. The CVCP can also join the site, and the network could help us develop a site on their website. There are no membership fees, no training fees, etc.

ALPINE is another connection the network has made in the academic world. It's focused at Middlebury College and it's focused around a program to assist RCPs in achieving projects.

The Network is also on LinkedIn too, and provides technical assistance via that media outlet. They have an e-newsletter they use to promote the successes of other RCPs.

Question – How do RCPs measure success (aside from acres conserved)? The first step is to look at whether the group is moving towards conservation. Then look at whether you're coordinating, sharing a map/story, if any partner is getting more funding that you wouldn't have before the partnership existed.

Question – How does the Highstead Foundation differ from the work local land trusts are already doing? The Cold Hollow to Canada RCP originated to do work that the Vermont Land Trust didn't want to do or couldn't do. The big question is to look at how this conservation work is translated on the ground. What is the value of the partnership to the groups that are already doing this work on the ground?

Question – How much work do you do with mapping and assistance to RCPs? The Highstead Foundation does have some mapping capacity (Brian Hall). Bill could connect the CVCP with him to see how they define parcel data and create parcel data.

A discussion started about whether the CVCP could begin to look at potential conservation opportunities in addition to the mapping project? To-date, the partnership has been heavily focused on completing the mapping project before diving into an analysis of potential conservation projects. This has been delayed due to the realization that it will take longer to sync all existing data and do thorough research on parcels. Bill suggested that he could connect Melanie their GIS person to find out whether there is any assistance they could provide. There is a grant called the Landscape Scale Restoration Grant Program that could possibly be used to map forest resources and parcel information. If interested, the partnership would need to connect with the State Forester to discuss. The grant is due in August.

Question – There is interest in hearing other stories from groups that have gone through the emergent phase. Bill suggested that a good contact might be Ed Hood with the Massachusetts – Connecticut Sustainable Forest Partnership. Cold Hollow to Canada is another good group to connect with. They have been particularly good at innovating.

At some point the partnership should look into having a lead connected to a private entity so that there is less connection to the political world and lower public controversy. Bill recommended that the group look at partners that would have the capacity to do this, both with staffing and funding.

Keeping partners engaged is the hardest thing to do over time. Make sure you know what you want to accomplish as an RCP before engaging with NGOs.

There is a collaborative leadership training September 16-18. Bill suggest 2-5 members of the partnership engage in this opportunity. The next RCP Network gathering is November 19th, at UMass Amherst. Ashley said that she would share a recent email from Bill that compiles video from the last network gathering.

Mapping Project – Work Session –

There was not much time to have a work session. Ashley reminded the group to send Melanie an email after you have made any edits to the map viewer. Ashley will connect with her to see if she can create a map for potential conservation opportunities. Work on the map can continue while we begin discussing potential projects. This will also allow the partnership to continue identifying potential data problems.

Community Engagement –

Ashley quickly mentioned the CVCP web page she has been working on through South Burlington's main website. She will send around the link. She did ask for folks to share content and photos to post on the page. This page is in progress and she will continue making changes to it.

Update: Spring NR206 Project –

There was no update related to this project.

The next meeting will be: March 25th 2:30 PM.

The meeting was adjourned.