

Champlain Valley Conservation Partnership Meeting
Wednesday, July 22, 2020; 1:30 PM
Remote GotoMeeting

Attendees: Ashley Parker, SB Project Manager; Melinda Scott, Williston Conservation Planner; Alex Weinhagen, Hinesburg Director of Planning & Zoning; Gail Albert, Shelburne Natural Resources & Conservation Committee; Abel Russ, St. George Development Review Board; Don Rendall, Shelburne Natural Resources & Conservation Committee; Holly Rees, Director of Recreation & Parks, South Burlington; Mark LaBarr, Audubon Vermont; Matt Boulanger, Williston Planning Director & Zoning Administrator; Larry Lewack, Charlotte Town Planner; Paul Conner, South Burlington Director of Planning & Zoning

Absent: Dean Pierce, Shelburne Director of Planning & Zoning ; Sarah Gentry Tischler, St. George Selectboard; Melanie Needle, Senior Planner, Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission; Bob Hyams, Hinesburg Conservation Commission; Lisa Kingsbury, UVM Planning Services; Kevin Dorn, City Manager, City of South Burlington; Kate Kelly, Hinesburg Conservation Commission; Sarah Dopp, President South Burlington Land Trust

Meeting began at approximately 1:35 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 February 26, 2020, meeting were accepted as-is without being reviewed in full.

Partner News and/or Updates –

Shelburne announced that they just lost their DRB Coordinator, so Dean has a lot on his plate.

South Burlington relayed that the City Council has committed Open Space Acquisition funding to help preserve one of the parcels associated with the AuClair project. The project connects with conserved land in Shelburne. The City is also moving forward with its first community hike of the season at Red Rocks Park. The hike will have many health precautions in place, including mask wearing, social distancing, online waivers, limited participation, and contact tracing planning. If this event goes well, the City hopes to add more hikes to the calendar.

Holly also added that in South Burlington, there has been a high demand on natural areas and increased usage of its parks and natural areas. This includes an increase in the number of dogs. She was interested in hearing from others how they are managing this increase, and any issues with dogs in particular. Shelburne noted that someone started cutting mountain bike trails on a conserved property. To derail this, the Town started putting up signage and since the signs have been up, there hasn't been much activity. Don noted that Front Porch Forum often serves as the discussion place for issues/complaints regarding dogs and impacts in the community. Melinda said that Williston has started looking at dog issues due to a private landowner putting in trails and indicating that they did not want

dogs off leash in order to protect wildlife habitat. They have put up signage that relays a positive tone. This was a recent example, so they don't know how this strategy is working.

Hinesburg is still engaged in their Natural Resource Inventory. They are hoping to have a first version of this in early fall, and then have an online public discussion. There are concerns with deer in the Town Forest. It was closed to recreational users last hunting season, and the closure will be expanded upon this year. It has brought up a conversation regarding restricting the use of natural areas, and when do you do that?

Conversation with Mark LaBarr, Audubon Vermont –

Mark LaBarr, the Conservation Program Manager with Audubon Vermont, joined the partnership to discuss opportunities for the partners to engage with Audubon in ongoing and future work.

Mark indicated that Audubon's existing work started with landowners to protect bird habitat in forests. They are now doing work in the Champlain Valley, including habitat assessments, connecting landowners with funding sources, etc. They have had a lot of success with projects on Town-owned properties. Their goal has been to create and maintain habitat for a suite of declining bird populations. Invasive plant management has been one of the more successful management techniques. Audubon is capable of focusing efforts on targeted properties and has utilized different management strategies with different landowners.

They think there is a huge opportunity to work with RCPs to identify and continue expanding the number of habitat management projects. Mapping has been done that identifies potential habitat projects. This could be overlaid onto the CVCP's potential conservation project map. Audubon has applied for grant funding that would allow for about ~\$1K to be given to RCPs to assist with projects. They see this as a way to increase their landowner network and ability to provide technical services.

Question: What does Audubon want the CVCP to consider?

The NFWF announcement will be at the end of August/early September. Audubon could probably start considering properties and projects in September. There is an incoming riparian gap analysis that will highlight what riparian systems need attention in the Champlain Valley.

The map Audubon has created has a Golden-Winged Warbler focus, but it could also include other species. Ashley will connect with Margaret Fowle to try and get access to this map so that Melanie can overlay it onto our map. Hopefully, the partnership can discuss potential project opportunities at its next meeting in August. Mark suggested that any outreach wait until after Audubon receives word on its grant. His ideal would be to identify additional potential projects and help spread awareness of the CVCP throughout the region.

Discussion: What regulatory tools are you using to protect open space –

Williston is looking at various tools to conserve open space (i.e.: amendments, open space agreements, etc.). They are especially interested in TDRs. What tools are other municipalities using and what has worked?

Hinesburg doesn't do TDRs so there is no regulatory construct for them. Most preservation work is done with landowners and land trusts. They also have open space agreements.

South Burlington does have a TDR program. It operates in the southern part of the City. It has been controversial. Residents would like to see development pressure elsewhere. There is a PUD program that is density based, and the TDR program which is a legal restriction on a parcel. There needs to be a demand (or a market) for the TDR program to work. Everyone has to be ok with both the idea of no development and increased density. It is challenging to find receiving areas for the TDRs – where should the development occur? It is a complex legal tool. If you create a program, you're setting up a mechanism that is not easy to undo down the road. The City is in the middle of re-looking at the program. We are trying to figure out the mechanisms and whether there is a market. The objective is to return economic value for someone that could also be down-zoned. The City just completed a Forest Block Assessment. Arrowwood Environmental looked at forest blocks of 20+ acres. The goal was to establish whether there are opportunities to transfer development potential from one forest area to another. The City also actively works with land trusts, landowners, and the conservation fund.

How did the word get out about the TDR program in South Burlington?

The TDR Committee has flagged this question as being something that is lacking in the City currently. The City has played a passive role in this since the program's inception. There was an idea of creating a marketplace that would be housed on the City's website and then sending notices to potential receiving sites.

Are there other tools that could be used to entice developers?

There needs to be a consideration of density and an ability to shift that density. You could establish a minimum density through a PUD process. Try to get the community to really identify and understand what their goal is. What do they want to achieve?

Williston has released a survey to try and gauge what kind of development their residents want to see and where.

Discussion: Dogs in Natural Areas –

Ashley provided an overview of the dog management issue that South Burlington has been exploring. There has been an increased use of City-owned natural areas and parks. There has also been an increase in impacts from dogs as more residents are owning dogs and bringing them to these sites. The City has initiated research to better understand impacts that dogs have on these areas. There is overwhelming research that indicated that dogs do have an impact on natural areas, and that this impact increases when dogs are off leash. This is a problem in South Burlington as there are many natural area and park users that do not abide by any leash regulations that might be established. The City has considered many possible strategies to try and mitigate these impacts, ranging from implementation of an education campaign, review of existing ordinance, placing additional sites in the leash ordinance, creating a dog park permit, and working with the partnership on a regional management plan. Ashley wanted to connect with others in this group to get a better understanding of the issues others are facing in their natural areas and parks, as well as what strategies they are currently

employing. If some of these issues are similar, would others be interested in working on a strategy together?

Shelburne has an animal control officer. Have a regional office might bring more enforcement.

Hinesburg felt that there doesn't seem to be a future for enforcement. Education and facilities is the best we can hope for. There is public shaming that happens on Front Porch Forum. They don't have a large Public Works department to assist with any removal of trash or maintenance needs. Alex wondered about the possibility of an Adopt-A-Park program, and also suggested the consideration of a regional signage effort.

Ashley thought the regional messaging was a good idea. She asked Melinda about Williston's Adopt-A-Trail program was going and whether that was helping their staff out. Melinda relayed that they started this program about a year ago. It was created by an intern. It does take a lot of effort to continue the movement. They have "adopters" for five of the 6 trails. These folks go out on their own, do cleanup, keep trail boxes stocked, etc. Most "adopters" are groups, rather than individuals. There is a challenge with getting everyone the same information. There initially was a training for those interested in the program, but they were not able to set something up this season.

Williston also reported that they do require dogs on leash. They have made flyers that include state guidance related to COVID and have seen more dogs on leash. Melinda can share their original signage for possible posting regionally.

The group seemed interested in coming up with signage that could be used to promote leashing regionally. There was also the idea that maybe there is a water quality group or organization that could help with this and potentially provide funding. Ashley suggested that possible the WNRCD might be a good partner for this.

Melinda also mentioned that the City of Boulder, CO, has a dog site and sound permit. In order to have your dog off leash, you have to get a special permit and go through training.

Mapping Project –

Ashley briefly relayed that Melanie is hoping to have a map for the group to review in August. Ashley will send that around when she gets it. She also reminded folks that if they are able to continue filling in missing data, that they should do so.

The next meeting is currently scheduled for: August 26th at 2:30 PM. It was agree that 1:30 could work if needed.

The meeting was adjourned.