

Champlain Valley Conservation Partnership Meeting
Wednesday, February 17, 2021; 1:30 PM
Remote GotoMeeting

Attendees: Ashley Parker, SB Project Manager; Holly Rees, Director of Recreation & Parks, South Burlington; Melinda Scott, Williston Conservation Planner; Alex Weinhagen, Hinesburg Director of Planning & Zoning; Melanie Needle, Senior Planner, Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission; Gail Albert, Shelburne Natural Resources & Conservation Committee; Don Rendall, Shelburne Natural Resources & Conservation Committee; Abel Russ, St. George Development Review Board; Jens Hilke, Conservation Planning Biologist, VT Fish & Wildlife Department; Larry Kupferman, South Burlington Natural Resources & Conservation Committee; Sarah Dopp, President South Burlington Land Trust; Bob Hyams, Hinesburg Conservation Commission; Kate Kelly, Hinesburg Conservation Commission

Absent: Dean Pierce, Shelburne Director of Planning & Zoning; Sarah Gentry Tischler, St. George Selectboard; Larry Lewack, Charlotte Town Planner

Meeting began at approximately 1:35 PM.

Welcome and Round of introductions.

Changes or additions to Agenda –

There were no changes or additions to the agenda.

Consideration of Minutes from Previous Meeting –

The minutes from the December 16, 2020, meeting were reviewed and were accepted as is.

Partner News and/or Updates –

Hinesburg reported that they completed their Natural Resources Inventory Map and that it is live and online. They will share the link and Ashley will pass it around.

The Shelburne Selectboard approved the amount requested by the Natural Resources & Conservation Committee for the Open Space fund. It is now on the ballot and they hope the voters approve it.

The Shelburne Natural Resources & Conservation Committee also had been approached by the Selectboard to consider policy regarding the humane treatment of animals. It came up after some issues related to beaver. A policy developed by the Committee is currently in front of the Selectboard for approval, and it is also on the Town website.

South Burlington reported that they have initiated a Dog Recreation Task Force to discuss issues associated with dogs in natural areas. It is composed of City staff and members of various committees. These are public meetings, and the group has met once so far. Ashley will be sure to share updates and notes that come from this group as the partnership has discussed this issue before and there appears to be regional interest in possible solutions.

The City is also promoting its Community Hike series and will be doing some in-person hikes in combination with virtual webinars. Events are pending state health guidance, but the first hike went really well. Ashley will share information related to the next webinar on invasive plant management with herbicide once the details are released.

Mapping Project –

Ashley wanted to do a check in to see where folks are at regarding their municipal level conservation data. Shelburne is making progress mapping forest blocks with the CCRPC. Their work is not public knowledge, as they are waiting for the work to be completed. The goal is to create a more widely used tool/layer based on a more regional metric of 20-acre size for a minimum block. Williston has been working with Jens on prioritizing habitat blocks and road crossings.

One idea would be to compare notes and consider potential regulatory framework. Take the mapping work being done at the municipal level and overlay that with the editable map viewer.

There was a quick recap of where partners are at with the map viewer – basically, it's still a work in progress. Ashley will check in with Dean to see what his thoughts are regarding the map viewer and the BioFinder review. The group's main question is: How are we going to use the dataset? What about protected/conserved agricultural parcels (how do we classify those based on use)? Melanie is going to check on this.

St. George confirmed that they should not have any parcels identified on the map.

How to move forward with the map viewer or BioFinder?

Ashley indicated that her goals for the BioFinder discussion were to get a sense of where conservation project opportunities might be between municipalities. Where were their commonalities, or places worth doing more of a deep dive? She asked if others had taken a look and noticed any potential "hot spots"?

Four areas were identified:

1. The Muddy Brook Corridor
2. Shelburne Pond
3. Lake Iroquois
4. Connections between St. George and Hinesburg.

There are different ways the group could move forward. Could look at municipal purchase of land or partner with land trusts. The partnership should consider what the goal is and what are the tools we could use to achieve that goal.

Shelburne has a focus on economic development, and their Natural Resources & Conservation Committee has a hard time trying to keep pace with the Planning Commission. Hinesburg feels that partnership is important and likes the sharing of information that is happening, but would like to start seeing some projects completed.

The idea behind looking at BioFinder was to begin the process of seeing big picture opportunities for conservation projects that the partnership could consider. These opportunities could be those that overlap municipal boundaries and have been overlooked. Jens is going to take the four areas identified and look at those in more detail. He'll bring back that information to the group to consider next steps as far as where to focus.

Discuss: Hunting & Trapping Policies Regionally –

Williston was wondering about policies regarding trapping on town-owned properties. The Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife are coming to talk to their Commission soon. South Burlington shared what its ordinance conveys. Williston indicated that municipalities can't regulate trapping and can't enact town-wide ordinances that regulate hunting/trapping.

Jens noted that he could ask around for additional information that might be useful.

Regional Stewardship Program/Network – Grant Opportunity –

Ashley asked if Melinda wanted to still discuss this opportunity, or if the timeline had passed. Melinda indicated it was a little late for this year, but noted that it might be worth pursuing down the road for technical assistance.

Discuss: Lewis Creek Association's Forest Carbon Project Concept –

The Lewis Creek Association had shared a project concept with Ashley, and Ashley wanted to share with the group to see what the group thought and whether there was interest in pursuing this. There was interest in asking Marty Illick to come to a future meeting to discuss it more with the partnership.

Overall, the group is interested in learning more about the idea and would like to encourage it. It sounds like more towns are moving towards a sustainability focus so this would fit in with that.

The partnership may have more input on this topic as we learn more about our own conservation project opportunities. It could fit with our group's stewardship and engagement theme – promoting the concept with landowners in our communities.

There was some question regarding what additional forestry practices would be recommended as part of this effort. What would it actually mean to landowners? What would be the focal point of this effort (policy, stewardship, outreach)? Some thought this was just another reason to protect as much forest as we can.

Regional Engagement Opportunities Hub –

The group briefly discussed this topic. It was suggested that the group utilize FPF to share event information so that other Towns could then also more easily share events with residents.

The next meeting is currently scheduled for: March 24th at 1:30 PM. It will be remote and Ashley will send along those details as it gets closer.

The meeting was adjourned.