

Champlain Valley Conservation Partnership Meeting
Wednesday, April 28, 2021; 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; Jens Hilke, Conservation Planning Biologist, VT Fish & Wildlife Department; Sarah Dopp, President South Burlington Land Trust; Bob Heiser, Vermont Land Trust; Duncan Murdoch, Intervale Center; Brad Elliott, Richmond Land Trust; Tom DiPietro, SB Stormwater; Nick Warner, Winooski Valley Park District; Mark LaBarr

Absent: Dean Pierce, Shelburne Director of Planning & Zoning; Don Rendall, Shelburne Natural Resources & Conservation Committee; Melanie Needle, Senior Planner, Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission; Sarah Gentry Tischler, St. George Selectboard; Larry Lewack, Charlotte Town Planner; Holly Rees, Director of Recreation & Parks, South Burlington; Larry Kupferman, South Burlington Natural Resources & Conservation Committee; Bob Hyams, Hinesburg Conservation Commission; Kate Kelly, Hinesburg Conservation Commission

Meeting began at approximately 1:35 PM.

Welcome and Round of introductions.

Changes or additions to Agenda –

Jens asked to provide an update to the hunting/trapping question that had been asked previously. The group agreed to add that to the stewardship discussion under agenda item #7.

Consideration of Minutes from Previous Meeting –

The minutes from the March 24, 2021, meeting were reviewed. Jens and Sarah noted they would send Ashley some minor edits to make after the meeting. The group accepted the minutes noting the amendments would be made later.

Partner News and/or Updates –

Gail reported that the Ewing project has hit a stumbling block. The Ewing family has pulled out of final conservation efforts associated with the agricultural land. They are now asking to have the land preserved through a community agreement among the landowners. No decision has been made yet, though there may be an announcement made at the next DRB meeting in Shelburne.

It was suggested the group take a moment of silence in honor of Marty Illick's life and work in conservation.

The South Burlington City Council has decided to move forward with a formal conservation easement on the Wheeler Nature Park property.

Project Planning –

Jens shared a map, which is a work in progress. The focus area is not precisely defined, but covers the area around Shelburne Pond, north into South Burlington, south into Hinesburg, and also the forest block that covers Mt. Pritchard (and most of St. George) and extends into Hinesburg, Williston, and Richmond.

Ashley reminded everyone that new potential partners were invited to this meeting to review ongoing conservation efforts in this region. Hopefully, this will provide some feedback for the partnership to consider when looking to select projects to focus on. She suggested that each potential partner introduce themselves, their organization, and provide some initial thoughts on projects in this area or ideas as to how the partnership could work with them or support their ongoing efforts.

Duncan works for the Intervale and he has been focused on a shared stewardship ethic/land ethic. He works with a variety of organizations in Burlington, South Burlington, and Winooski. He has been trying to assemble uniform ways to engage the community in stewardship, and the Intervale is gearing up to release a new Trail Stewardship Program. One of the issues he has been working on recently is sustainable fiddlehead harvesting practices.

Brad is with the Richmond Land Trust and is involved with a lot of stewardship issues and has a wish list of projects related to stewardship, including signage and branding. He is working on a set of 8 preserves around Richmond. There might be a project developing off of East Hill Road on the western border of Richmond. There is a lot of work and fundraising happening around Gillick Pond. Sally Fellows and VLT have conserved some land on the western edge of Richmond. Richmond has had a town conservation fund since 2005, subject to an annual vote. A one cent tax that raises \$40 - \$70K a year. The fund attracts outside grants that end up being much greater than the town fund. The land trust is an independent nonprofit, and not a town entity. People apply to the conservation commission for funds, and then the decision goes to the selectboard.

Jens is doing webinars on conservation funds that are recorded and available to watch.

Tom is the Stormwater Director in South Burlington and he shared a couple of maps related to two potential projects in South Burlington. One is Muddy Brook in Williston/South Burlington off of Van Sicklen Road (the Goodrich Parcel). There is a large open field that needs invasive removal, and there are other restoration and trail connectivity possibilities with this parcel. The other is a very wet cornfield just south of Butler Farms. Tom has a lot of water quality data for the stream coming through Butler Farms. The plan would be to conserve most of the parcel and then let it revert to wetland.

Bob Heiser is with the Vermont Land Trust, and their group focuses on forested land and community projects. They typically hold conservation easements on private land. They have over 2,000 easements over 600,000 acres across the state. One project they are working on is the Auclair project. The trajectory of VLT's work includes working on already conserved land, water quality, farmer access, and 'access and ownership', including public access and bringing conservation outcomes to underserved communities. There is a lot of conserved land in the partnership's target area, and there may be a potential project in Williston.

Mark is with Audubon VT. His work is focusing on forest shrubland birds, and they also provide technical assistance to landowners in order to promote goldenwing warbler habitat. They have conducted riparian planting around Lewis Creek, and removed invasives from old fields. They have grant funding from NFWF to support the partnership in some initial stewardship/landowner outreach work. Audubon does have a GIS map that could be overlaid to see where habitat in the partnership's focus area might be.

Nick is with the Winooski Valley Park District. They have 19 parks on or near the Lower Winooski and they are about 80% funded by municipalities. They prioritize the ability to maintain their lands with paid staff. He was interested in the possibilities in conjunction with the South Burlington "Goodrich Parcel" as it is connected to their Muddy Brook Park 2 property. Since there has been an increase in resources, they have been taking a moment to figure out how to do this kind of work properly and to look at how we are going to manage/maintain new land properly. COVID interrupted their conversation with the VYCC related to the possibility of the creation of mobile crews that could reduce costs to those interested in participating. There has also been a lot of recent interest in selling or donating parcels to the WVPD. Public access is a big deal. They also have worked with Audubon before on their Colchester Pond project.

Ashley wanted to move onto considering different strategies for moving forward, including taking a look at the structure of the partnership. What is the best way to select a project? Are work groups something we should consider? She identified several buckets/themes stemming from the overviews presented by the visiting partners, including: education/outreach, stewardship, land preservation, natural resources inventories and mapping, affordability and access, and water quality. Perhaps a work group could focus on one of these buckets and identify the priorities/projects within. If we created a regional stewardship work group, other outside folks could be invited to join in that work group, and then report back to the overall partnership on steps forward or potential project decisions.

Mark suggested that we look for a geographic area that would overlap with all of the buckets. There was also conversation around the "Goodrich Parcel" appearing to be a good fit since it has an existing restoration plan and connection to the WVPD parcel with trails. Mark also indicated there is likely shrubland habitat there. There was also the continuing question of how to maintain a growing portfolio of conservation lands, and that this could possibly be its own project. Melinda raised the possibility of engaging with students. Mark noted that Audubon has done this around Shelburne Pond to identify project areas. Alex is thinking along the lines of identifying a geographic area, talking to land trusts, and then doing landowner outreach, but also supports the idea of subgroups focusing on a project area (i.e.: stewardship). Information sharing continues to be helpful and important.

Jens discussed what he described as cross-cutting issues we could work on – in a coordination capacity, not just updating each other about what we're doing individually – including stewardship and land protection.

Sarah raised the issue of valuable parcels that may face development pressure. Abel suggested that this is a big issue in St. George. Ashley asked for input in the form of parcel ids from each of our

municipalities, properties that might be high priorities for preservation. Mark suggested a parallel list of properties that might be high priorities for management and stewardship (already conserved).

Regional Stewardship Discussion –

Time was running out so this discussion was limited to the trapping update provided by Jens. He confirmed that towns can ban trapping on town-owned land. Kim Royer is going to be meeting with Melinda and Williston in the next month to discuss.

The next meeting is currently scheduled for: May 26th at 1:30 PM. It will be remote and Ashley will send along those details as it gets closer.

The meeting was adjourned.