

Feb 17, 2024 | 📅 Conservation Committee

Attendees: Hallie Whitcomb, Carrie Kellow, Nathaniel Ells, and Geetu Melwani.

The meeting was called to order at 11:43 am, with roll call. With the absence of Heidi, Geetu volunteered to take minutes, and the committee members had no objections.

I Updates from Committee Members

Hallie

1. Hospital Pollinator project: Hallie met with Cheryl Joy Lipton regarding spreading seeds on the Hospital hillside last week. However, that hillside is facing north and so was still covered with snow, so unable to spread the seeds.
2. There is a meeting scheduled with the school superintendents on March 6th. Hallie will confirm if the meeting is at 2 pm. Hallie would like the Tech center to be included in this March 6th meeting, and will work on that.
3. New items shared
4. Good/Bad news: Bumble bees added to endangered species; it's not good news that bees are endangered but good news that the plight is finally recognized.
5. Hallie shared a Jan 10 Brattleboro Reformer article: [Grafton elementary students explore newly established community forest](#) - Vanessa Stern is a teacher who used to be here in Springfield, but is now a teacher in Grafton. Stern takes students to visits to the forest, and sessions include intention setting, and expression of gratitude. The article shares information about Bull Creek Common Lands, which is a nonprofit organization.
 - a. One idea might be to get in touch with Bull Creek Common Lands and see if there is a partnership opportunity with land around Springfield.
 - b. Maybe raise this example with the Springfield schools - encourage a similar approach locally.

Nate

1. Nate had been forwarding multiple emails to this committee, including: a focus group on Act 59, as well as a lot of different legislative efforts around conservation issues. Some of these issues may serve as future agenda items for this committee. Nate is assisting the committee stay informed of these state-wide efforts. Nate forwarded other information/new items including:
 - a. Article on setting up a climate super-fund.
 - b. EPA has new emission standards on particulate matter.
2. Nate posted a question to the AVCC listserv on the pros and cons from that group on Biomass
3. Nate reminded the committee members that we all received an email from the engineering company, Criterium-Lalancette and Dudka, which is conducting a Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment. Nate replied to them and said the committee will discuss this, but it's unlikely we are the right set of people to respond. Carrie pointed out

that this is the purview of Planning and Zoning. Carrie will bring this to the attention of the Planning and Zoning Administrator, Chuck Wise.

4. Attended the selectboard meeting via Zoom where the sole agenda item was the Town Plan. (This is on our agenda, and will be discussed later.)
5. Attended intro session to selectboard candidates at the Library.

Carrie

1. Carrie reported on the Selectboard meeting where our Mission & Goals were discussed and the board was appreciative of the committee's work.
2. Carrie has been working through the archive for information on the North Springfield biomass project. Project started 2009 and was denied in 2014. A lot of information and arguments against the biomass plant showed up in 2013 or so. She will continue to dig into the information and provide summaries when able
 - a. Nate reported that Kelly Stenner (via the ACC listserv) has information on N. Springfield.
3. Carrie has received information on the Weatherfield's dam; and will compile the information to share with the committee.
4. The DRB is reviewing a stone quarry proposal; Carrie will forward what information she can. Just to keep the committee informed. The DRB will meet on this on Feb 27th.
 - a. Geetu feels that in the future we need to be more informed about the land use patterns around Springfield so we can weigh in on DRB projects as they may impact conservation lands and flora/fauna.
 - b. Carrie shared that the Agency of Natural Resources has land use maps but the information they have are incomplete. We may be of great use to update the ANR data on Springfield areas. For example, the wetlands in Springfield are not fully identified on ANR.
 - c. Committee discussed the need for different members of the committee to serve as the point persons on different projects. For example:
 - i. Hallie is taking point on School projects & Pollinator project
 - ii. Carrie wants to take point on identifying wetlands around Springfield
 - iii. Nate has been point person on updating the committee on state-wide and local legislative actions relevant to conservation
 - iv. Geetu has been taking point on the Biomass issue, and will be including Heidi moving forward.
5. Reminder that on 2/21 will be the Town Plan review.
6. The Charlestown bridge has mussels which are endangered. The project of restoring the bridge may involve moving the mussels. Carrie will keep an eye on this and ensure we are included in the conversation.

Geetu -

1. The Stop VT Biomass that meets weekly; primarily around Burlington and initial focus has been the McNeil Biomass Plant. There's a new proposal to create a Biomass power generator in Lyndon, and the Stop VT Biomass group is working with Lyndon local folks to learn more about that.

2. 350 VT is another advocacy group that Geetu has connected with.
3. Both organizations are working on public education.
 - a. She has learned that the N Springfield Biomass project was stopped primarily due to concerns over the emissions from transporting wood chips/pellets as well as the storage of these.
 - b. Cheryl Joy Lipton, Geetu and two other StopVTBiomass members will be presenting to the Greater Rockingham Area Services (GRAS) board of directors on 2/26 - to educate them on negatives of Biomass as a solution, and to present alternative solutions, including weatherization, heat pumps, and geothermal solutions.

II Open Forum

There were no members of the public in attendance; hence no Open Forum session. Carrie suggests that we remove the "Open Forum" as a separate agenda item. However, whenever there are members of the public in attendance, we can have them speak up during the Committee Updates section of the meeting. There were no objections to this proposal.

III Agenda Items

Additions to the agenda proposed by Nate: 1. Discussing Committee emails & Tech assistance; 2. Act 59 Focus Group input; 3. Committee member press release. No objections made to these additions.

1. Town Plan. The committee discussed the background we received regarding the language in the Conservation Committee section of the town plan. After considerable discussion, the committee came to the conclusion that the goals and objectives that appear in the town plan are really for the larger chapter.
 - a. **Decision:** we will ask that they move the section on the Springfield Conservation committee (SCC) further up in chapter 3; and add the CC's mission statement to the town plan.
 - b. Carrie is to send a hard copy of the draft Town Plan to Hallie. She had already sent the draft Town Plan as a pdf to the rest of the Conservation Committee.
2. Light Pollution - Black River Produce has put in new lights that have generated some complaints from residents in the area. The DRB has asked that Black River Produce provide to the DRB to explain the change in lighting. Carrie will keep the
3. Committee emails and technical assistance: Nate explored Google workspaces for the committee. There is Google for Government and for Business, but both have a cost. Instead, we should explore if we can get a committee email address from the town. The committee discussed asking for a meeting with Jens Hilke who provides free technical assistance to VT municipalities and often helps Conservation Commissions. Jens had sent an email offering his assistance.

- a. **Motion** from Nate: That Nate contact Jens Hilke of Vermont Fish & Wildlife to arrange an information meeting on technology we can use. Seconded by Hallie. Passed unanimously.
4. Act 59 (Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act) Focus Group.
 - a. Motion by Nate: That Nate would like to contact the AVCC board on how the SCC could participate in the focus group. Seconded by Hallie. Passed unanimously.
5. Nate proposed that we send out a press release on our new mission & goals; and advertise that there's an opening for a seventh member. After discussion, this issue was tabled for now till after the email/technical issue is resolved.

The next meeting is scheduled for **March 2nd**.

Meeting adjourned @ **1:32pm**

Action items

- ☐ Carrie to take our request regarding the placement of the Conservation Committee section in the Town Plan.
- ☐ Carrie will send the Hard Copy of the town plan to Hallie.
- ☐ Hallie to meet with Schools Superintendents in early March.
- ☐ Carrie will bring the Criterium-Lalancette and Dudka email to the attention of the Planning and Zoning Administrator. She will also respond to the email from the engineering company and let them know we've passed their request up the chain.
- ☐ Carrie to follow-up on the mussels on Charlestown bridge.
- ☐ Nate to contact Jens Hilke to ask for an informational meeting.
- ☐ Nate to contact the AVCC board about how SCC can participate in the Act 59 focus group.