

Mount Holly Conservation Commission (MHCC)

Meeting Minutes

January 5, 2021

Opening

The regular meeting of the Mount Holly Conservation Commission (MHCC) was called to order at 7:05 pm on January 5, 2021 via Zoom by Phillippe Crane.

Present

Annette Lynch, Fra DeVine, Peter Smith, Nicole Lewis, Phillippe Crane, Philip Leonard, Mark Zelis, Fred Garrow, Jim Corven. Guests: Jon McCann, Stephen Michel.

Approval of Agenda

The agenda was accepted by consensus.

Approval of Minutes

F. DeVine moved to accept the minutes, seconded by M. Zelis, approved unanimously.

Open Issues

F. DeVine opened with a description of the continuing process to develop a **community survey** by asking the full commission to now review and discuss the survey objectives and draft questions. He stated that it would probably cost \$1,000 – 1,500 to complete the survey depending on the methods used. He explained that helpful advice received from Prof. Rich Clark, Castleton University, suggests that we evaluate each question by asking “How will each question contribute to help with policy development?”

A. Lynch asked for clarification of the purpose for the survey. F. DeVine stated that he believes it is to obtain broader input from the whole community regarding what the MHCC should do. A. Lynch and P. Crane agreed that some of the proposed questions, while important, were outside the scope of the CC and we should focus more on the purposes of a conservation commission. A. Lynch stated that she felt we should focus on the environment and natural resources and that we should make better use of existing information such as the Arrowwood Ecological Inventory and available resources including Biofinder maps. (<https://anr.vermont.gov/maps/biofinder>) and the Vermont Atlas of Natural Resources (<https://anrmaps.vermont.gov/websites/anra5/>).

P. Smith added that we should focus on what people want in town and that, in general, more information is better. S. Michel added that the Planning Commission might want to know peoples’ preferences on various issues. J. Corven suggested that the demographic questions (#1-13) are not really needed and could be seen as intrusive, causing some people to not participate. J. McCann asked which specific questions asked about the town’s interest in natural resources. He felt that, as worded, none did. A. Lynch suggested that based on the existing Arrowwood inventory we should ask questions about specific values and features in town, such as scenic views. F. DeVine concluded that we should eliminate most of the demographic questions, keeping one regarding full-time vs part-time residents and that the sub-committee will discuss these recommendations further.

A. Lynch provided a discussion based on the article “**Environmental education** outcomes for conservation: a systematic review” (Elsevier: Biological Conservation). The paper reviewed many studies of the impacts of environmental education on policy development, behavior changes, and environmental benefits. She explained that the paper suggests for Mount Holly that we should try to work with random groups that share common interests to realize specific priorities. It was suggested that perhaps Rich Clark could provide some guidance to develop a specialized town study or project. F. DeVine and P. Crane suggested that we use the described approach to work on specific issues.

M. Zelis of the **Star Lake sub-committee** reported there may be funding available through the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation Watershed Grants program. He explained that the program offers funding for education & outreach, inventory & monitoring, and project implementation with maximum grants of \$5,000, \$3,500, and \$10,000 respectively. Proposals are due February 5, 2021 and that M. Zelis and J. Corven are reviewing the criteria and process to prepare a proposal. A. Lynch stated her support for this initiative because the importance of Star Lake to the community. It was noted that the Selectboard should be informed of this initiative and that their endorsement may be required for proposal submission. M. Zelis and J. Corven agreed to prepare an overview of the intended project and provide that to the Co-chairs for the letter to the Selectboard.

New Business

J. Corven gave a brief presentation about the opportunity of establishing a no-cost online **iNaturalist Project** in collaboration with the Mount Holly Conservation Trust (MHCT) to study and inventory the biodiversity of Mount Holly. This Project would serve to help update information about plants and animals found in town and their relative abundance in lieu of the unfunded Municipal Planning Grant that would have updated the ecological inventory of town. Further it would encourage community participation and become a focused environmental education project that generates useful scientific data. P. Crane requested that a written description of the project so the Commission could decide.

Action Items

- Review & revise questions for the town survey. (F. DeVine & Survey sub-committee)
- Seek advice from R. Clark regarding specialized studies in town. (F. Devine & A. Lynch)
- Prepare field research overview of Star Lake for Selectboard. (M. Zelis & J. Corven)
- Provide CC with an overview of the iNaturalist Project proposal. (J. Corven)
- Prepare & submit the VT ANR Watershed Grants proposal. (M. Zelis & sub-committee))

Next Meeting

The next meeting of MHCC will be on Tuesday, February 2 at 7:00 pm via Zoom. The agenda will be provided by F. DeVine/P. Crane.

Adjournment

P. Leonard moved to adjourn, seconded by A. Lynch. Adjourned at 8:15 pm.

Minutes recorded and submitted by Jim Corven, acting clerk.