

Mount Holly Conservation Commission (MHCC)

Meeting Minutes

March 2, 2021

Opening

The regular meeting of the Mount Holly Conservation Commission (MHCC) was called to order at 7:11 pm on March 2, 2021 via Zoom by Fra DeVine.

Present

Annette Lynch, Fra DeVine, Peter Smith, Philippe Crane, Philip Leonard, Jim Corven. Guests: Rich Clark, Willow Hogan (Castleton University)

Approval of Agenda

F. DeVine moved, seconded by P. Crane, the agenda was accepted by consensus.

Approval of Minutes

F. DeVine moved to accept the minutes, seconded by P. Crane, approved unanimously.

Open Issues

P. Crane reported that since the last meeting, a proposal to develop a **Shade Tree Plan** for the town has been submitted and Mount Holly has been selected as one of about 10 towns to develop a Shade Tree plan in collaboration with the Vermont Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) Program. We are in the process of putting together the team from Mt Holly who will participate in the development of this plan. Important members will be the Mt. Holly Tree Warden and the chief of the town road crew. Since the current Tree Warden will not be continuing, a new Tree Warden needs to be appointed. We are in conversation with several people who may be interested in joining the team. We are also considering an open call to Mt Holly residents to participate. We also need to present the formal letter of agreement with the UCF to the Select Board and get their approval for the Mt. Holly Conservation Commission to sign this on behalf of the town.

F. DeVine provided an update of the **community survey**. The Survey Committee had an introductory meeting with the student pollsters from Castleton University and their Professor Rich Clark. Prof. Clark then explained that the Pollsters have done a review of the questions and format necessary for a good flow through the form. Additional suggestions for revisions have been provided by MHCC members and will also be considered. It was agreed that the Survey Committee will meet with the Castleton Univ. team on Monday, March 8 to do a deep dive of the survey questions and format to prepare for publication.

P. Leonard reported that the MHCC has submitted a proposal titled **Star Lake Conservation Outreach** for a grant under the Vermont Watershed Grant Program. Proposals will be reviewed during March and results announced thereafter. The activities will center on education related to conservation of one of the town's primary assets. J. Corven commented that the project would have

support from water testing activities to be conducted by the MH Health Officer and the State Lay Monitoring program.

A. Lynch provided a progress report on the comprehensive **inventory** of natural, cultural, and recreational resources of Mount Holly. It was agreed that “developing and maintaining” the inventories listed in the Statute specifying the work of conservation commissions is an ongoing task – central to the mandate of conservation commissions – and probably taking some years, rather than months. It was further agreed that this task of inventory compilation was a job to be done by the Commission members.

There will be two categories of inventories: 1) Environmental & Natural Resources and 2) Special Resources (e.g. scenic, historic, cultural, & recreational). Each inventory will consist of a number of elements including a definition/description, mapping, conservation importance (ecological & economic), plus other data as needed. Examples are found for the environmental inventory in the [Arrowwood Report](#) titled “Natural Heritage Element Inventory” (available on the Mount Holly website) for elements such as: Vernal Pools, Mast Stands, Bear Wetlands, Deer Wintering Areas, etc. To begin an inventory process that recognizes the learning curve that faces the Commission and its members it was decided to begin with the Environmental Inventory (most useful to the Planning Commission at this time) and to aim for two members of the commission to work together on compiling information on each of the above 4 elements.

P. Crane noted that members of the Commission were already involved in Commission projects and that he felt there was very limited capacity to undertake the 4 agreed upon element descriptions. F. Devine asked A. Lynch to work with F. Garrow to develop an example of an element description to post on Google Drive for review by MHCC and bring to the Commission at its next meeting. It was also suggested that participants in the MH iNaturalist Biodiversity project might be recruited to assist with the inventory.

J. Corven provided an update of the **iNaturalist Biodiversity Project** (<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/mount-holly-biodiversity>) and explained that the project has a dual purpose. It will contribute to the town natural resource inventory (a primary purpose of conservation commissions) and to motivate people to appreciate and conserve the natural resources of our town. Another article about the project was also published in the Chit Chat to further promote participation. To date over 563 species have been identified by 97 observers in Mount Holly and 25 people have specifically joined the project online. F. DeVine suggested that it might be time to provide some public training to familiarize more people with how to use iNaturalist and it was agreed to begin preparing such outreach as spring approached.

New Business No new business was introduced.

Action Items

- Organize the Shade Tree Plan team and agreements for the VT Urban & Community Forestry program. (P. Crane)
- Revise & finalize survey instrument for the town survey. (F. DeVine & Survey sub-committee)
- Monitor the results of the VT ANR Watershed Grant proposal. (P. Leonard)
- Update town inventory and upload with a sample element to Google Drive. (A. Lynch & F. Garrow)
- Provide listing of elements and assign to commission members (A. Lynch & F. Garrow)
- Organize public training options for the Mount Holly Biodiversity project. (J. Corven)
- Recruit assistance from iNaturalist project participants for town inventory. (J. Corven & A. Lynch)

Next Meeting

The next meeting of MHCC will be on Tuesday, April 6 at 7:00 pm via Zoom. The agenda will be provided by F. DeVine/P. Crane.

Adjournment

F. Devine moved to adjourn, seconded by P. Crane. Adjourned at 8:20 pm.

Minutes recorded and submitted by Jim Corven, acting clerk.