

# Mount Holly Conservation Commission (MHCC)

## Meeting Minutes

April 6, 2021

### Opening

The regular meeting of the Mount Holly Conservation Commission (MHCC) was called to order at 7:05 pm on April 6, 2021 via Zoom by Fra DeVine.

### Present

Annette Lynch, Fra DeVine, Peter Smith, Philippe Crane, Philip Leonard, Fred Garrow. Guests: Stephen Michel, Ron Unterman

### Approval of Agenda

F. DeVine moved, seconded by P. Crane; the agenda was modified to include Open Meetings under Other Business and accepted by consensus.

### Approval of Minutes

F. DeVine moved to accept the minutes, seconded by P. Crane, approved unanimously with one typo noted.

### Open Issues

P. Crane reported on implementation of the **Shade Tree Plan** in collaboration with the Vermont Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) Program. The Shade Tree Committee is still in the process of recruiting members. The names of several potential members were mentioned but contact is on hold until the tree warden is appointed. Appointment of a tree warden is critical to developing a Shade Tree Plan. Phil Crane has spoken with Joanne Garton the project lead at UCF and explained the situation. She mentioned that it would be important to have the tree warden in place by June since there will be an important event concerning this program then.

P. Leonard reported that the **Star Lake Conservation Outreach** proposal for a grant under the Vermont Watershed Grant Program was not funded. [A request for feedback on this action has been made, but is without response. Editor.] He urged that some of the proposed activities (water testing, organizing a Star Lake Association, and a Wildlife Management Area event) should be undertaken even without funding. F. DeVine asked that a plan for doing this be prepared. A. Lynch asked that a copy of the proposal should be sent to all MHCC members.

F. DeVine provided an update regarding the **community survey** in progress. Survey responses will continue until Friday, April 9. Thus far 107 responses have been completed on line, and 6 on paper; an additional 13 on line responses were returned incomplete and deemed unusable by Prof. Rich Clark.

Results will be processed after April 9 and reported to the Commission when the processing is complete. Fra urged Commission members to complete and submit a survey I they have not already done so.

A. Lynch discussed three aspects of addressing a comprehensive inventory of Environmental and Natural Resources related to wildlife, namely, deer wintering areas, mast stands, and vernal pools. These relate to her email of March 29 with its 10 attachments (some referenced below), as well as to the maps provided earlier to members of the Commission. She referenced the report from Arrowwood Environmental (AE) which can be found at the town web site. (See <http://www.mounthollyvt.org/planning-commission/natural-history-inventory-of-mount-holly/> to access these materials.)

The discussion was focused on three aspects: Deer Winter Habitat (paper 4 and map 4 among the MHCC Inventory Papers attached to March 29 email), Mast Stands (paper 5 and map 5), and Vernal Pools (paper 6 and map 6). Annette discussed attributes of **deer winter habitat** and pointed out that the map highlights high value areas. The Town Plan of 2008 includes Vermont data, whereas AE contains more detail. This reflects that Arrowwood did extensive work “on the ground” and produced much durable information. F. DeVine asked what tools might be used in order to produce mapping that would help track changes due to development in the years since the AE study was done. (The role of GIS mapping in such updating should be explored.) Regarding **mast stands**, we might want to distinguish between “hard” (beech and oak, sources of nuts) and “soft” (berries). P. Smith indicated that he doubts that much change has occurred regarding this category. P. Crane asked about the completeness of the AE data here. Regarding **vernal pools** Annette pointed out that remote data indicate 32 in Mount Holly; not all of these have been verified because several lie on privately owned land.

Online information on vernal pools can be found at <https://val.vtecostudies.org/projects/vermont-vernal-pool-atlas/> (an atlas of vernal pools in Vermont), at <https://vtecostudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/vce-vernal-pool-mapping-final-report.pdf> (a Final Report on a 2009-2012 Vermont mapping project), at <https://www.vernalpool.org> (a non-profit association in Peabody, MA) and <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/vernal-pool-certification> (showing how Massachusetts certifies vernal pools).

At a future meeting, A. Lynch will discuss Ledge Habitats, Core Forest areas and Riparian Forest areas. She referred members to the descriptions and maps contained in AE. Of relevance here is a 2018 Vermont law regarding the fragmentation of forest areas. Discussion ensued about how to plan, and technical means for implementing, updated versions inventorying these resources. In order to have some “on the ground” experience for MHCC members, a field trip conducted by Jim Corven to visit vernal pools near the Healdville Trail was proposed.

**New Business** We discussed Vermont's Open Meetings law and its bearing on meetings of the MHCC. This includes that whenever a quorum (5 or more of our current 8 members) gathers to discuss business, it can be considered a formal meeting. Here is a link to the VT Open Meetings Laws and Regulations. <https://sos.vermont.gov/media/vpnbxckz/a-guide-to-open-meetings-january-2019.pdf>

### **Action Items**

- Continue to organize the Shade Tree Plan team and agreements for the VT Urban & Community Forestry program. (P. Crane)
- Assemble and report data from the town survey. (F. DeVine & Survey sub-committee)
- Make a plan for a few activities connected to the Star Lake WGA grant proposal. (P. Leonard)
- Continue work on inventory and updating mapping capabilities. (A. Lynch & F. Garrow)
- Plan a field trip to selected vernal pools. (MHCC members)

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting of MHCC will be on Tuesday, May 4 at 7:00 pm via Zoom. The agenda will be provided by F. DeVine/P. Crane.

**Adjournment** A. Lynch moved to adjourn, seconded by P. Crane. The meeting adjourned at 8:20 pm.

Minutes recorded and submitted by Phil Leonard, apprentice clerk.