**November 2023 Addison County Conservation Commissions Summit – Meeting Notes**

On Saturday, November 4th, members of almost all of the conservation commissions in Addison County met in Bristol at Holley Hall to share information and move towards working together more collaboratively. The meeting consisted of four parts: a sharing session where each commission highlighted their activities in four minutes; 4 breakout sessions (funding; educational and outreach activities; making CCs more effective; and special projects); a keynote address given by Amy Sheldon; and a wrap-up focused on working together in the future. Below are notes from the Summit, including notes from three of the four breakout sessions.

Town CC Summaries – information shared that is not in handout

* Bristol
  + 8 of 9 positions filled
  + Large portion of town in Green Mtn Nat’l Forest
  + Potential area to collaborate on – Strategic tools to translate natural resources values (from mapping exercises) into action, ie: how to use data to influence planning commissions
* Lincoln
  + 4 of 5 positions filled
  + Roadside invasive species – groups of volunteers are assigned a section of road to maintain
  + Generally no ‘regulatory’ role; not involved with PC, DRB
* Middlebury
  + Developing relationships with PC and DRB; make recommendations to them
  + Working to get Forest and Connectivity Blocks in Town Plan revision
* Monkton
  + Have put in several pollinator gardens in collaboration with Pollinator Pathway of Addison County
  + Worked with Arrowhead Environmental consultants on inventory and maps (available on town website)
  + Planning on working with the Forest Management Team regarding new town forest
  + Tiny Grant from AVCC to purchase invasive plant tools that can be checked out
* New Haven
  + CC focus on education, not regulatory or engagement with SB, PC, etc
  + Wildlife Crossing Study – working with Sophie Mazowita on trail cameras and tracking; Jens also involved in project
    - 2 yrs of data gathering
    - 1 yr of data analysis then will share results with the PC
* Ripton
  + 7 of 9 positions filled
  + Large portion of town in Green Mtn Nat’l Forest
  + 3yr project to change classification of 3 brooks from state class B to class A1 waterways
  + Wetland mapping includes finding any vernal pools not on state maps
  + Headwater protection, flood mitigation, global warming – can we work together on key areas to protect
* Salisbury
  + 9 members – challenge is bringing in new “younger” members
  + Education of town on myth of perpetual growth – Tom Wessel came to speak to PC
    - Trying to engrain new thinking about ‘growth’
    - have a document that can share with other CCs
  + Worked with local junkyard to pay people and pick up old cars to get them off the land
  + Town position candidate forums to ask them questions relevant to conservation
  + Have conducted wildlife tracking over several years on ALL roads in the town and have this information in the town plan
* Weybridge
  + Conservation work takes a “group effort”
    - Have worked with MALT on easement purchases
    - Monument Farms has put significant land into conservation
  + Future focus:
    - Flood resiliency
    - Biodiversity (1/2 Earth concept)
    - Forest Mapping
    - Joint Municipal project
      * across Champlain Valley
      * starting with border towns
* Starksboro
  + Established in 1989
  + 5 positions, 1 pending
  + Main focus is building community by highlighting natural resources of the town
  + First Sugar Maker Tour in 1995
    - Then picked up by the state
  + 700 acres conserved w/ Land Trust
    - 2 organic farms
    - 100 acres of riparian area
  + Lewis Creek Trail – hold walks, invasive management, trail upkeep
  + Work with town school on education programs
  + Annual Harvest Supper
  + Beaver infrastructure is key focus
  + No official funding but have had good success with getting grants
* Mid-Champlain Valley Regional Conservation Partnership
  + Cross boundary projects at landscape vs. town level
  + Group arose out of a 2020 meeting with ecology experts and town people
  + Focused on northern Addison County
  + Having an organization helps with interfaces with funding organizations, etc
    - There are many RCPs across New England
  + Educational focus – Ebird training, bird habitat, pollinator seeds
  + Big issue to tackle is the lack of zoning regulations to prevent habitat fragmentation, especially across town borders
  + ?any interest in forming a group focused on Southern Addison Co?
    - Happy to help on this
  + See more information at end of this document

Keynote Presentation from Amy Sheldon – comments made that were not on her PowerPoint slides

* Nature based solutions – we have evolved with all other life and we can’t exist without it!
* “Get out of Nature’s way and let her heal us”
* Energy needs and values can clash across groups re: agriculture vs conservation
* 30 by 30/50 by 50: Yes want to conserve 50% by 2050 but where we do develop in other 50% need to do it well, with natural resources in mind
* Working to see if can use wanton waste and other legislation to rein in aquatic nuisance control – ie: insecticide application in water ways
* Act 59 – creates a VISION for VT; defines conservation with a focus on biodiversity
  + Preserve 80% of VT species – proactive conservation plan
  + Emphasizes need to strategic investments
  + Need further policy changes to support meeting the goals
  + RE: golf courses and soccer fields should not count toward 30 by 30 goals!
  + Need to focus on Natural Communities (re: *Wetland, Woodland, Wildland* by Thompson, Sorensen, Zaino) not just any lands – need to preserve diversity of these communities to save diversity of species
* Individual action MATTERS – can make a difference
* Need to have Big Picture/Long View
* Keep in mind that just because your town’s land may be in National or State Forests that they are being managed well
* Habitat, etc. mapping – good but do it with the end goal in mind
  + Then collect the data needed to support that goal
  + Remember to consider natural communities specific to your towns that need to be preserved just as much as larger blocks of land and connectors
* Amy agrees that a statewide Planning Office is important to address monitoring of plans and keeping focus on the big picture – re: not town level
  + State is putting too much load on Towns without providing the support and funding needed

Where do we go from here?

* Having someone at ACRPC who is knowledgeable and *dedicated* to conservation planning would be a great help to the CCs
* Each town’s CC can host other CC members to come and explore natural resource area in their town so we can all understand and appreciate the varied nature of Addison County
* Thinking about forest blocks, corridors, etc across town boundaries would help us better support connected habitat, plan for climate change, etc
  + Best way to do this would be to integrate into our town Future Land Use maps, then into those at the regional level (Amy S)
  + Need to ground in conservation design
* Maps need to go beyond ‘topographical’ and ‘model based’ state level data currently used and make sure have observational, science based data to define critical areas that need conservation
* Continue to communicate across CCs more often – online, digitally, etc. as can’t do these gatherings frequently
  + Document repository that each CC can contribute to so can share best practices
  + Request made to ACRPC to see if they could host some sort of platform like this (google drive or similar, Listserv for communication, etc)
* Develop a Southern Addison County RPC to compliment northern focused one
* Need to develop ways to talk to town road foremen about dealing with beavers
  + Beavers can help protect infrastructure; not a threat to it
    - Monkton has done this well and could be a model for other CCs
    - Check out <https://beaverdeceivers.com/>
    - Website has good information
  + Maybe all CC’s should have more regular communication with Road Commissioners
* Community interfaces very varied across the towns
  + How to best coordinate relationships
* Need to fill in town’s without CCs so cover all of the county
* There are state and federal dollars that can be tapped into
  + RPC can help match funds to projects so reach out to them to see if they can help
  + Suggestion made to have a virtual meeting with Andrew to learn about the available funding opportunities and what types of projects have been/might get funded

**Breakout session on funding Conservation Commissions:**

* + Successful programs lead to credibility, which can lead to more $$$.

* + Community involvement is important (community survey around Town Forest

uses)

* + High visibility projects lead to more support.
  + Challenge: How to prioritize projects and selection?
  + Challenge: hard to react to land purchase (?) opportunities with limited access to funds.
  + Implications of being charged with easement monitoring.
  + How to demonstrate the VALUE of CC's? ( Conservation, building community, education,) Participate in DRB meetings, work with State agencies (F&W) Be clear about mission. Make yourselves relevant. Reach out to other CC's. Go to Regional Planning meetings. Offer pre-review option for development. Work together on projects.
  + Source funding through Clean Water Service Provider program. Match percentages can be hard to meet.
  + Vt. Urban and Community Forests program.
  + Make yourselves RELEVANT and known, and cross-pollinate with other town bodies, commissions, depts.

- Planning Commission and CC relationship is important.

**Notes from Education and Outreach Breakout Session**

Speaker ideas:

* State employees re: ANR, F&W, Wetlands group
* College profs (may charge – unless living in your town?)

Hosting events:

* Rain or shine mostly
* Collaborate with local groups – Historical societies, libraries
* Get the word out – FPF, Addy Indy
* Benefits of pre-registration: know numbers, can manage number of attendees, send emails if need to (if cancelling, etc)
* Post the presentations/talks on website to get more leverage (film them if can, recordings of virtual ones)

Lending materials:

* Invasive tools
* Tracking cards and snowshoes
* Wildlife cameras (\*)
* Binoculars

Other ideas:

* Story book trails – in conjunction with library, school
* How to get help to control invasives – “Come learn with us and try out neat tools”
* Partnering with other CCs
* Policy talks, etc – may bring in different audiences
* Nature journaling sessions at town sites (Bristol resident who does this for fee)
* Organize trips to other towns’ trails
* Use amphibian road crossing events to educate about importance of ‘corridors’
* To reinforce winter tracking skills – host events at other folks ‘tracking trails’ on their properties – need to be sure to have skilled folks attending

**Notes from Special Projects Breakout Session**

**-Starksboro:** Interested in planning for forest conservation and how to collaborate.

**-Weybridge:** Updating maps of conserved lands, wildlife corridors, town forest assessment. Planning for wetlands.

**-Lincoln:** creating pollinator gardens.

**-Monkton:** Natural Resources mapping to get information in the Town plan.

**-Salisbury:**  Wildlife corridor mapping of road crossings, used in Town Plan. Town Forest management plan and development of Pitch Pine Trail.

**Middlebury:** Mapping is ongoing and available in a data base. Goal is to incorporate into the Town Plan.

**Cornwall:** Working on Wildlife Habitat Connectivity Blocks and Inventory.

**New Haven:** Connectivity study via tracking and use of game camera documentation. (Facilitated by a hired consultant) Volunteers, consultant, and CC place the cameras and

collect the data.

**Mark Raishart** (VHCB, Passing Land program: discussed use of BioFinder and Vt. Atlas (Vermont Conservation Design)

**Some takeaways:** 1. ACRPC hold some sessions around maps, what's available and reading and using them.

* + - * 1. UVM and Middlebury College students can be resources for some projects. Establish contacts and relationships with professors and departments.
        2. Connect with the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and use as a resource when working to protect parcels, particularly working with landowners.
        3. ARPA funds are possible funding source.
        4. ACRPC- money and labor for water quality projects.