

## RPC\_Minutes\_2019.06.04

### Members Present:

Stuart Levasseur  
Bushrod Powers  
Sarah Danly  
Jim Rikert  
Mark Wood  
Geo Honigford  
Nell Gwin

### Other Attendees:

Kimberly Gilbert, TRORC  
Brad Salzman, Conservation Commission  
David Barker, Conservation Commission  
Tico Wolff, Conservation Commission  
Mike Bald, Conservation Commission

### Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 pm by Stuart Levasseur, Chair.

#### Notes on scheduling and logistics:

- At the June 18 meeting we will have an hour unscheduled to go back through previously discussed sections of the plan to resolve remaining business.
- The June 18 meeting is also the public forum (for the hour before the normal PC meeting.) The ad will run in the Herald on Thursday. Rose will put up paper notices around town as well.
- Kimberly Gilbert shared a list of potential trainings from TRORC that the PC can request. The PC did not request any at this time but Stuart will share the list by email for future reference.

#### Chapter review: Natural, Scenic and Historic Resources

The Conservation Commission shared a list of revisions that they proposed. Together with the CC, the Planning Commission reviewed these and decided which to accept.

- Added “scenic and archaeological” types of resources to the first goal and first objective.
  - After a clarifying question from the PC, the CC explained that “archaeologic” covers anything from the first people in the state to about 50 years ago, and the distinction between archaeological and historical resources could potentially be blurry but generally the former is below ground and the latter is above ground.
- There was a suggestion to add an objective of reviewing development projects to ensure minimal negative impact on the region’s wildlife habitat connectivity blocks. The combined group discussed:
  - Who would be responsible for the reviewing?

- Instead of aiming for minimal negative impact, should we be trying to grow the wildlife habitat connectivity?
  - The group discussed what this would actually look like and determined that the main approach is to avoid further fragmentation with the hopes that improvement happens with the passage of time as we keep important areas protected.
  - The PC will discuss this topic further in a separate chapter on forest block and habitat connectivity and will look more closely at examples from Tunbridge.
- The objective around “actively plan for the conservation of unique resources” was removed as being redundant/overly general.
- Language in Recommendation 3 was shortened.
- The CC flagged for consideration the question of water as a natural resource and what potential enforcement authority the town would have to prevent overuse.
  - The only enforcement authority would be through Act 250 proceedings or with bylaws that enforce the town plan.
- Language about the “historic preservation committee” was changed to the “Royalton Historical Society” for accuracy. However, the existing recommendation, which was kept, would be for the historical society to seek governmental status and *become* a historic preservation committee, which would allow them to secure funding on behalf of the town.
- Language around the national historic list, the historic register, and the locations being recommended for a survey, was adjusted for clarity. The new recommendation is to do a survey of possible historic places *and* an architectural survey, both for the town as a whole.
- There were questions on what was intended by the recommendation around a scenic highway designation and whether that program still exists. Kimberly will research and get back to the PC.
- Added a recommendation to “acknowledge and mitigate the impact of climate change on our natural systems, way of life, and local economy.”
- The group discussed the regulations governing the extraction of earth resources. After some debate on whether these policies should be strengthened (i.e. to further limit extraction), the group decided to keep the intent the same but adjust wording for clarity.
- A recommendation was added on recognizing the importance of plant animal and insect biodiversity in our planning to address those factors that negatively impact our natural resource.
- A reference to human health was added to the list of potential impacts of climate change.
- The group discussed the limits on construction based on the seasonal high water table, and the relationship of this to the flood plain zoning.
  - This is an independent issue and does not depend on the flood plain decisions – high water table is not necessarily the same areas as the flood plain.
  - The group discussed whether the intent of this was to limit construction for practical and safety reasons, or in order to protect wetland habitat, and noted that the current language (around a seasonal high water table) does not necessarily imply official wetlands.
  - A reference to the water table *in general* was moved into the land use chapter and the instance here in the natural resources chapter was edited to clearly refer to wetland areas.

- The group discussed the issue of buffer strips, and how to accommodate the fact that buffer strip needs are site specific. After a number of potential scenarios were discussed, the group decided to rework the policy to refer simply to “site-specific vegetation and soil considerations.”
- “Critical wildlife habitat designated in the plan should be protected from incompatible uses” was edited to be more broadly applicable by removing “designated in the plan.”
- A reference to safety was added to “human life and health.”
- The names of designated land use areas were edited for accuracy and references to maps were added where appropriate. Other minor wording changes for accuracy or clarity were suggested by the CC and accepted by the PC. Additional minor wording changes were made to the background information.
- The group discussed the invasive species paragraph that was proposed by Mike Bald. The Planning Commission is supportive of addressing invasive species and felt that including it only within the “extraction sites” discussion was too limited, especially when other town activities contribute at least as much to the spread of invasives. Mike Bald will draft a paragraph, and consider additional policies and recommendations, that can be added to subsection J on Flora, Fauna, and Natural Communities.
- In the groundwater subsection, a reference was added to pesticide applications as a contamination source of concern.
- The shorelands subsection was updated.
- A reference to climate change was added to the background section on flooding, as well as the sentences “Royalton experiences flood damage every year. Tropical storm Irene clearly illustrated the town’s flood damage vulnerability and associated repair expenses.” Kimberly will look into whether there is data on the yearly increase in dollar amount of damage from flooding.

The group discussed whether to keep the agriculture and forestry chapter separate from the natural resources chapter (as in the current plan) or to combine them (as many towns do). The group acknowledged that, because these topics are all so integrated, it is hard to break them up, but decided that there is so much content in each of them that keeping them separate will increase readability. Separate chapters also allows for separate treatments of agriculture and forestry -- as an economic driver in a separate chapter and with a conservation lens in the natural resources chapter.

- The agricultural background information that currently lives within the Natural Resources chapter will be moved to the ag/forestry chapter and discussed in conjunction with the information already there.
- However, to express the interconnectedness of these issues and help a potential reader find all the relevant information, a sentence will be added to the Natural Resources chapter explaining the connection and referring to the Ag/Forestry chapter. Kimberly will draft language.

The Planning Commission did not complete its review of the Conservation Commission’s proposed edits and will revisit the chapter at a future meeting.

#### Updates on the Floodplain Recommendation:

Stuart Levasseur and Geo Honigford provided an update on their meeting with the Selectboard about the idea of increasing the floodplain bylaws to the 500 year floodplain. The SB determined that they didn’t feel comfortable supporting this change until they know what the reaction would be from the people who are impacted by this.

- Geo has already collected some info on the impact in terms of # of properties etc.
- First the Selectboard would like to see information on the number of people who would be affected. At some point there will be a public meeting about this topic, with invitations specifically sent to landowners who would be impacted. (Geo noted that his property would be impacted by this as well.)

Bushrod Powers motioned to adjourn, Mark Wood seconded. Meeting was adjourned at 9:07 pm.