

Town of Hinesburg PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

June 8, 2011

Approved August 10, 2011

Members Present: Tim Clancy, Jean Isham, Joe Iadanza, Bob Linck, Carrie Fenn, Kyle Bostwick, Ray Mainer arrived @ 8pm,

Members Absent: Johanna White, Tom Ayer

Also Present: Alex Weinhagen (Planning/Zoning Director), Mary Seemann (Recording Secretary), David Hirth (Conservation Committee), Lloyd Seemann, Andrea Morgante, John Kiedaisch, Jean Kiedaisch, Melissa Levy, Chuck Reiss, Ken Brown, Carol Jenkins, Sally Reiss.

Jean I called the meeting to order at 7:36pm.

Alex W gave a quick summary of the discussions the Planning Commission had at their last meeting: a new process to go by in terms of developing a subdivision, assessing the natural resources that are important in the rural areas and throughout the entire town, and how the sequence of the planning of a subdivision should work both by the applicant and the Development Review Board. He said they discussed the first step should be identifying the primary and secondary resource areas. He said there wasn't a lot of debate or discussion on the primary areas which are generally thought to be unbuildable areas due to the terrain, example being in Flood Hazard Area, or having steep slopes. **Alex W** said the Commissioners did get into a discussion on the secondary resource areas. He reviewed the four items the Commission thought needed a more thorough examination and discussion. It was decided they would talk about one of these items at different meetings. Wildlife Habitat was the first on the list. He said earlier this year the Wildlife Department teamed with the Vermont Natural Resource Council and they did an assessment of towns in Vermont to see how their town plans dealt with the wildlife and how this was dealt with in their regulations. Hinesburg is in the majority as our regulations don't speak to wildlife habitat effectively. At the last meeting the Commissioners talked about what is Wildlife Habitat, and what is considered critical Wildlife Habitat. **Alex W** said one of the things the Commissioners need to do is define what is critical Wildlife Habitat and how would they define what types of wildlife they are talking about.

1. Rural Area Regulation Revisions – Addressing Wildlife Habitat

Conservation Subdivision Design Standards – critical wildlife habitat as a secondary resource. What constitutes "critical wildlife habitat". Wildlife diversity is important and nearly every parcel of land in Hinesburg provides habitat to one or more species.

- **Six critical wildlife habitats described in the Town Plan (section 4.7)**
 1. Large tracks of forest with few if any roads-(Core forest or interior forest).
 2. Large tracks of open fields.
 3. Early transition forest areas
 4. Wetlands and riparian areas- (Riparian areas run along the waterways).
 5. Unique habitat related to those threatened and endangered species.

6. Corridors between all these areas.

It was discussed and agreed that the easiest way to define a critical wildlife habitat is to have a clear definition that refers back to the town plan section 4.7.

- **Habitats of regional significance** – e.g., clayplain forest, regional forest habitat corridors, major riparian areas.

Alex W talked about a landscape level/regional analysis of wildlife connectivity and contiguous habitat. This was done for the Lewis Creek Association and LaPlatte Watershed by Vermont Fish and Wildlife, Addison County Regional Planning Committee and with help from our own two watershed groups.

- ***Draft Greenspace Plan – summary of Ecological/Wildlife Resources section (David Hirth, Conservation Commission)***

Alex W turned the discussion over to David Hirth.

David H said he would talk about the corridors first. The map the Planning Commissioners were looking at shows a pathway on the west side of town in which animals can and should be able to move from as far north as Shelburne Pond, down through Hinesburg all the way down to Monkton. He pointed out there were some weak links in this chain.

On the east side of town he felt that area should be taken all the way up to Williston as there is a lot of unbroken woodland habitat that goes up that far.

He listed what he thought were the challenges:

1. Maintaining those passageways/corridors into the future.
2. Provide east/west linkages so Rte 116 doesn't become the dividing line between the east and west sides of the road.

He said the map he was showing/using was put together partly by a biologist from the VT Fish & Wildlife Department, a consulting firm they use, the Conservation Commission, by himself and Alex Weinhagen. He talked about how the challenge is to figure out how critters can get from one area to another and how connections are important as they enable animals to put together small habitats to create one large area. He said another reason is so the young can disperse, where they can have a place of their own and not compete with the elders.

3. His third point was that some habitats are important only at certain times, for example, deer yards.

David H said there needs to be some kind of linkage from summer habitat to a wintering area. He said these corridors are also considered important to prevent genetic isolation of small populations.

There was a discussion on high traffic roads (Rte 116, Shelburne Falls Rd, and Silver Street) and where it looks promising to create corridors for the animals to cross these roads. **David H** said there are a couple of important aspects to corridors; 1. Animals have to be able to travel through them and 2. It has to have covering as animals don't like to travel across areas where they are exposed to all predators.

There was more discussion on how and where animals could possibly cross safely.

- ***Habitats at Risk map:***

David H talked about the different animals and their ability to cross Rte 116; deer being a fast moving animal versus mice and snakes which move rather slowly. He said he found an article that gave the statistics on how many deer die each year on the highways of Vermont. He said the estimate is about 2,500. He went on to say the number of bucks, (which are fast moving animals) that are killed each year during legal hunting season is estimated at about 10,000, so that figures out to be 25% of the deer/buck harvest are harvested by cars. So it is understandable that slower animals couldn't possibly make it across Rte 116 safely.

Alex W showed a map pointing out some of the deer wintering areas. He said there are certain patterns, at least with regard to the core forest habitat that is mentioned in the Town Plan as one of those six critical wildlife habitats. The bulk being on the eastern hillsides with important corridor connections. There are large chunks of core forest on the western side that are just a little obscured by the natural features that surround them.

Jean I asked how this map was intended to be used, how would David or Melissa interpret the map, and are these the only habitats in town that are at risk.

- ***Core habitat areas and connecting corridors map***

David H said these core forest areas are important for a bunch of wildlife species and they do well on the eastern side of town. The idea is to keep certain areas clear without houses. This is a tough challenge for the Planning Commission.

David H talked about how culverts are becoming an important part of this idea. He said when considering a culvert as a pathway for the animals the Commission should remember that they need to have smooth flowing water going thru them, they need to be low enough for a straight flow of water, and if money is available, they should be oversized. This leaves enough room on the sides of the stream so that small to medium size animals can make it along the edges without needing to cross a road.

Andrea Morgante said the town has money available and agreed the larger culverts are needed. There was a discussion on the culverts in Monkton for salamander crossing.

Jean I asked if a survey has been done in Hinesburg about wildlife.

Andrea M said 10+ years ago. VT Fish & Wildlife kept track of where the animals were crossing safely and where they had trouble making it across safely.

John Kiedaisch said he has a hard time with the map. He stated he lives on Lewis Creek and said he can walk all the way to the school from his house and still be in the woods and he knows there are coyotes, fisher cats, bobcats and bear. He said he feels this map shows there is no wildlife habitat and cover on the flat land in Hinesburg. He would caution the Planning Commission from using this map as a guide.

There was a short discussion on core forest, what the Planning Commission wants the map to achieve and how forest land has been disappearing in the Champlain Valley. There was a discussion on the different colors in the blocks on the map and what each color represented.

Melissa Levy said the map is a part of the whole picture showing what is going on in a particular part of town. It goes along with the other maps. She said the map with the transportation corridors can be helpful.

Kyle B asked; if someone has a proposal to do some level of development in one of the red areas indicated on the map, is the Planning Commission going to ask that a developer to "TRY" to avoid any corridors or are they going down the road where they would "HAVE" to avoid them. He asked the Commissioners where they are going with this, and if it was felt by the Planning Commissioners that some areas were more important than others

David H said if this map is published a potential buyer could look at the map see it has been identified as having a corridor running thru it and may decide not buy that particular parcel.

Kyle B said it would be nice to identify what land the Planning Commission wants to protect and if they truly want to protect that area they should figure out a way for all to pay for it not just a single person.

Andrea M said there is a problem with deer over population. This is an important fact we need to think about in our Subdivision Regulations.

Chuck Reiss said Lincoln Hill has development on the dirt roads and it has forest that borders both sides of the road. He asked if there are houses and they are 30 meters apart, does that make that area a corridor? His last concern is the town forest is now getting a lot of activity and he would like to get a sense how much activity, such as snowmobiles, affect the wildlife.

David H said Wisconsin did a study on how snowmobiles affect deer. It turns out cross country skiers have more of an impact. Deer can hear the snowmobiles, but not the skier.

The Commissioners had a discussion on the need to have buffers.

Jean I asked if there were any questions from either the Commissioners or the public. No response. She talked about what the next step should be.

Alex W said the Planning Commission needs to come up with a clear definition for the critical wildlife habitat and to figure out how they want to specify it in the Subdivision Design Standards.

Carrie F said this definition must be precise.

Tim C said if the Planning Commission is serious about the need to protect wildlife then just stating it in the design standards is not enough.

Kyle B said what he was trying to say is the land should speak for itself. He is also concerned if the design standards would be unfairly boxing someone into a corner. We have to be upfront and honest with developers.

Jean I thanked Melissa and David for coming to the meeting and giving the presentation.

David H said he and Melissa live close by and would be willing to come back anytime to help.

Alex W asked what the Planning Commissioners want they wanted to do next. He read off the different topics that need to be discussed with which Commissioner volunteered to do the research on it.

Bob L said he would like to decide what to do with the wildlife habitat before moving on to some other subject.

Melissa L asked if the Commissioners thought it would make sense to look at other states and their methods of dealing with wildlife habitats.

Jean I said her thinking is to take that as a secondary resource, and there needs to be a discussion on what the appropriate buffer should be. She said she thinks they need to define what is meant by the 6 itmes in the town plan; they need definitions.

It was discussed what the next step(s) should be, whether the Conservation Committee would be participating in that discussion, and a discussion on map overlays.

2. Minutes of the May 25, 2011 Meeting

Carrie F moved to accept as amended, **Joe I** seconded. A vote was taken. 7-0.
[THE MOTION PASSED.](#)

3. Other Business & Announcements

- Correspondence received from Roger Kohn regarding the Kinneys store.

Kyle B made a motion to close the meeting, **Tim C** seconded.
The meeting ended at 10:18pm

Respectfully Submitted,

Mary Seemann (Recording Secretary)

You can view this meeting in its entirety by going to: www.VCAM.org