Full Commission Meeting
October 29, 2019
Newbrook Fire Department, Newfane, VT

Commissioners Present in Person: Gabby Ciuffreda (Chair), Lynette Hamilton, Linda Hecker, Roger Turner, Caleb Kissling, Eric Stevens, Steve Lembke, Everett Wilson, Stephan Chait, Andy Coyne, Joel Bluming, Denis Pinkernell, Edith Mas, Piet van Loon, Karen Astley, John Whitman, Jessica Tobey, Will Bissonnette, Andrew Snelling, Tim Arsenault, Jack Cunningham, Bobbi Kilburn, Stephen Dotson, Charles Goodwin, Jenepher Burnell, Bill Dunkel

Commissioners Participating via Conference Call: None.


Guest Speaker: Jens Hilke, Conservation Planning Biologist with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department Community Wildlife Program

Guests: Note – an invitation to this meeting was sent to all town planning and conservation commissions.

Staff: Chris Campany, Executive Director; Margo Ghia, Natural Resources Planner

Introductions: There was a quorum with 18 towns present.

The meeting was called to order by Chair Gabby Ciuffreda at approximately 6:05 p.m.

Everyone in attendance was asked to introduce themselves.

There were no changes to the agenda.

Program:

Habitat Connectivity and the Northern Appalachian Region Staying Connected Initiative. Jens Hilke, Conservation Planning Biologist with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department Community Wildlife Program, discussed habitat connectivity, Vermont Conservation Design, and the Staying Connected Initiative, an international collaboration that seeks to conserve, restore, and enhance landscape connectivity across the Northern Appalachian/Acadian region of the U.S. and Canada for the benefit of nature and people. Sustaining connectivity safeguards native wildlife and plants from the impacts of habitat fragmentation and climate change, and supports human activities and values...
that are tied to the forested landscape. SCI unites its U.S. and Canadian partners to focus the tools of conservation science, land protection, community outreach, land use planning, transportation and policy to meet its mission. He explained how this related to regional and municipal policy. The intent of state policy, and these conservation initiatives broadly, is not to preclude all use but rather to encourage landowners and local policy makers to maintain habitat quality so as to avoid further fragmentation and to connect existing fragments where possible to reestablish corridors. Vermont’s geography and land cover are essential to maintaining and improving habitat connectivity within Northern Appalachia. Jens was asked about the basis for the delineation of priority conservation lands and their boundaries. It was explained that regional habitat connectivity is best when large areas are uninterrupted, and that this is particularly important in areas where there is a high level of species diversity. While the western edge of the Windham Region is relatively well connected, the eastern half of the region, which is more biologically diverse, is much more fragmented. WRC Natural Resource Planner Margo Ghia was introduced at the meeting, and described the Windham Connectivity Collaborative, a project funded by the High Meadows Fund that will allow the WRC to provide support to towns in the southeastern quadrant of the region pursue their self-initiative habitat connectivity effort, as well as a region-wide discussion to inform local connectivity and conservation efforts and regional policy and strategy.

Administrative Items:

Approval of September 24, 2019 Meeting Minutes: On a motion by Commissioner Arsenault, seconded by Commissioner Cunningham, the minutes were approved with 5 abstentions.

Approval of Treasurer’s Report: Secretary-Treasurer Kilburn reported that the FY2018 audit was complete, that the FY2019 indirect cost rate proposal was being developed, and that the FY2019 audit should get underway around toward the end of the year. She anticipates that by the next meeting of the Full Commission in January that we should be able to resume regular financial reporting. On a motion by Commissioner Mas, seconded by Commissioner Arsenault, the Treasurer’s Report was approved.

Executive Directors’ Report: Executive Director Campany explained that the WRC has submitted a proposal for a VT Public Service Department Broadband Innovation Grant in collaboration with Valley Net and the Center on Rural Innovation to develop a feasibility analysis and business plan to improve access to high-speed broadband to underserved communities for the region as a whole. This work will be done in collaboration with towns. One of the questions the feasibility analysis and business plan should answer is how many communications union districts will be needed within the region to expand high speed broadband access.

Chair’s Report: Chair Ciuffreda noted that this would be the last Full Commission for 2019. The Commission will next meet in January. Executive Director Campany suggested that communications union districts could be discussed and that town planning commissions, Selectboards and broadband committees be invited.
Public Comment: None was offered.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:45 p.m. on a motion by Commissioner Arsenault, seconded by Commissioner Goodwin.

Respectfully submitted,
Ashley Collins