

TOWN OF MARLBORO  
CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES  
Monday, August 7th, 2017  
6:30 PM  
Town Office, South Road

**Present:**

Ashley Bies, Staley McDermet, Edie Mas, Bennett Grout, Mary Sargent, Adam Gebb, Dante Corsano, Kevin Kennedy.

**Wildlife Road Crossings**

Joined by members of the Marlboro Planning Commission to discuss the proposed wildlife overlay zoning. They have recently decided to not proceed with the proposed wildlife road crossing overlay because of the level of opposition to it that was expressed at recent Planning Commission meetings. The proposed wildlife habitat overlay is still a part of the zoning regulations.

There was interest at the PC meeting in making consideration of wildlife road crossing voluntary. So that when someone is considering developing their land they can be shown that moving its location can benefit wildlife and habitat.

Adam: What if there are no rules regarding wildlife road crossings, but we require that people be shown where crossing are on their land, and how important crossings are. This would have to happen before they could proceed with development.

Edie: They could be educated on crossings when they buy their land.

Staley: The PC knows of all the landowners with crossings on their land; we can make them aware of it through mailings. It could go out every year, every other year, etc.

Edie: Part of the opposition to crossings came from the fact that people weren't aware of the longterm work that the CC has been engaged in over the years. How do we make people aware of the process of what we're doing. It's important to also educate on fluvial restrictions.

Dante: Wasn't the purpose of this to be voluntary all along?

Edie: If it's in the zoning regulations, there are mandatory aspects to it: if someone proposed development at a wildlife crossing, they would have to have additional impact reviews done and shared with the Development Review Board. In some cases the DRB could require that the location of development within a parcel be changed, though development could not be prevented on any parcel because of wildlife crossings.

Staley: If the crossing review is in the zoning regs, the review had to happen; it wasn't voluntary. The CC should consider having an annual meeting discussing crossings and what that means. Keep the map online and available.

Edie: Over time a track record will be developed with data on all the development that has been done on property with wildlife overlays, so we can track and show, for example, that development can occur and the habitat regulation is not a big deal.

Now that crossings have become a controversial issue, it has the attention of people, so that people will pay more attention to any CC education efforts.

Ashley: Much of the resistance to the proposed road crossing zoning has come because people have only become aware of the proposal here near the end of the process, when it feels like something very new and different suddenly being put in front of them which they're being asked to swallow with at most a few minor changes. This process might have unfolded differently if the relevant landowners were contacted and asked for input at its start, and probably very differently if the whole town were asked to shape new zoning proposals through a longterm process that represented all parts of the Town in localized meetings. Hartford used this approach to shape its very successful zoning process, which included wildlife overlays and rural zoning provisions, and their Town Planner strongly recommends exploring a similar approach, of applying for a Vermont Municipal Planning Grant to fund expert facilitation process at the scale of local neighborhoods.

Edie: In the past, people have begun organizing a process of neighborhood meetings to talk about, among other things, conservation planning. A Municipal Planning Grant was received for the current round of zoning revisions and several Town-wide and neighborhood meetings were held, though the facilitator didn't have much experience. A booth at the Town Fair helped identify 8 neighborhoods for local meetings, but this effort dwindled away after two neighborhood meetings were held. Edie likes the idea of resuming this approach with going forward for wildlife crossings.

Ashley: The deadline to apply for a 2018 Municipal Planning Grant is October 2nd. Ashley hopes the CC and the PC can collaborate in applying for funding, and finding an approach like Hartford's that fits for Marlboro.

Staley: Having a town-wide education effort to show people the importance and value of maintaining habitat would be helpful for Marlboro's wildlife. If people are educated, most of them will be on board with developing regulations.

Adam: Wishes that one crossing was kept in the regulations—the one on Route 9 at the Town Garage. It is the most critical crossing in Marlboro and in the region, and keeping just this crossing would minimize the number of affected landowners.

Staley: It would be a very involved process for one road crossing. It would be a lot of regulations for one crossing.

Kevin: Concerned that people would view this as a foot in the door; that it would simply be the first step toward putting in place all the wildlife crossings.

Edie: The PC considered changing what the setback would be for riparian areas, but were also concerned that people would consider this a sneaky way to put in place wildlife crossings.

Bennett: Our goal is to pass all the other changes being proposed for zoning. This one issue had been the only part of the regulations that had opposition.

Eddie: The Hogback Commission is very good at engaging with people in a hands-on way to better understand the issues.

Consider contacting VNRC about developing an education program.

The PC members left the CC meeting at approximately 7:30 p.m.

### **History of CC**

When Adam moved to town 12 years ago, the CC existed but didn't meet regularly. When Adam took over about 10 years ago, began meeting more regularly and focusing on wildlife road crossings. Dante joined at least six years ago.

The CC spent a lot of time driving the roads of town collecting data.

Much of the collected data was lost when George Leoniak's website holding it crashed. But more than 80 percent of the crossings are riparian, which is supported by state and ecologists as being key wildlife crossings regardless of any other landscape features (or wildlife movement data that's been collected).

### **New commissioners**

There is general interest in inviting new commissioners who may in fact have issues with wildlife crossings, who could add perspective and be educated by participating in the process.

**Next meeting:** TBD

Respectfully submitted, Kevin Kennedy