

Ferrisburgh Conservation Commission
Meeting February 13, 2015
Approved Copy

In attendance for the FCC: Craig Heindel, Chairman, Dennis Armell,
Amy Dohner, Jen Cirillo
Jens Hawkins-Hilke, ANR Fish & Wildlife Dep't,
guest speaker

Craig opened the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

A. Ferrisburgh's Ecological Resources

1. Jens Hawkins-Hilke, Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife Biologist, had been invited to present his evaluation of Ferrisburgh's significant natural areas and ecological resources. Jens discussed the following with us:
2. Ferrisburgh's single most important natural characteristic is its extensive riparian network (streams, rivers, wetlands). This network provides flood resiliency, water quality protection and wildlife habitat & corridors. He recommends that the 50-foot riparian buffer that is recommended in the state guideline is only adequate (that is, wide enough to offer useful protection) in the headwaters areas only (for "first-order" streams – the small streams where bigger streams originate). Lower down along streams and rivers, downstream of the headwaters areas, 50 ft. is not wide enough to provide much protection of ecological and water quality values.
3. Jens recommended Jericho's recent zoning ordinance regarding riparian buffers as being a good example; and VLCT has a good model ordinance (Millie Archer is the contact at VLCT). Jen Cirillo offered to track down the Jericho riparian buffer zoning ordinance.
4. He showed us how to use the ANR Bio-Finder – it's an on-line atlas and information source about ecological and biological aspects of Vermont.
 - a. He can provide details on "biological hot-spots" that are identified on this atlas.
 - b. There are lots of rare species in Ferrisburgh indicated on the Bio-Finder. Some of them are state-listed, some are federally-listed. Also there are a few threatened and endangered species in Ferrisburgh. He said that the Indiana bat is the only federally-listed endangered species that has been identified in Ferrisburgh. Other bat species may be listed soon by the feds. Elissa Bennett is a good contact at ANR regarding bat habitat, etc.
5. He recommends that the Town Plan and Zoning Bylaws include protection for rare, threatened and endangered species, by such mechanisms as an overlay district being included in the Zoning Regs and Map, and the topic being addressed in the Town Plan, Zoning Bylaws, and Subdivision Regulations. Warren has a useful checklist with its review process for subdivisions, which we might consider. He recommended that our Town Plan include a section on this topic, so that it can be implemented by the Zoning and/or Subdivision Regs. Include appropriate definitions, and refer to specific map(s) in the Town Plan. Some town plans include a list of rare, threatened and endangered species that have been identified in their towns (he can provide such a list). Some towns require zoning and subdivision applicants to confirm that the listed species have been evaluated on their properties, including a requirement to obtain a sign-off letter from the VT Non-Game and Natural Heritage Program.
6. Jens said he would be glad to assist in reviewing the draft Town Plan, and also the Addison County Regional Plan that we recently received a request to provide input on. See Item B below for more on the Addison County Regional Plan.
7. Specifically regarding the Town Plan re-write, Jens suggested the following:

a. Include language about having appropriate culvert sizing, and road ditch installation and maintenance that provides adequate flood resiliency and water quality protection.

b. In the Energy section, include a statement that climate change is predicted to change the hydrology and other ecological factors of Vermont and Ferrisburgh. The Town Plan, town actions, town regs should take those changes into account.

c. In the Agriculture section, include the concept that agricultural activities should provide water quality protection to the streams, rivers, wetlands and aquifers in town.

B. Addison County Regional Plan, Map of Regionally Significant Resources

1. Arabella Holzapfel, the town's rep on the ACRPC, had emailed us asking for the Conservation Commission's input on the update of the Regionally Significant Resources section and map. We discussed this topic, including getting input from Jens Hawkins-Hilke. The Conservation Commission has the following draft suggestions. Craig will circulate a write-up of these draft recommendations to the CC members and Jens for review and possible revisions, before submitting them to the ACRPC's Natural Resources Committee, prior to their next meeting on March 11, 2015.

2. Below are our draft recommendations to the Natural Resources Committee of the ACRPC regarding revisions to the Regionally Significant Resources Map and section in the Regional Plan:

a. Add all riparian buffers, not just the riparian buffer that is shown along the major higher-order streams (called "Major Watershed Streams" on the current map -- from north to south they are Lewis Creek, Little Otter Creek and a major southern tributary, Otter Creek, and Dead Creek). Ferrisburgh's network of surface water courses is a major contributor of runoff and sediment to Lake Champlain, and this hydrologic network also provides the majority of the wildlife corridors in town. These aspects are regional in nature, and are significant. At least add the next-lower-order streams that are tributary to the major high-order streams shown on the current map.

b. Add "habitat blocks" (from BioFinder) larger than about 250 acres in size. These are important contiguous forested areas which provide regionally significant wildlife habitat for many different species.

c. Add all of the "significant natural communities" from BioFinder. These are all regionally significant. They include clay plain forests, which are unusual -- and which are regionally significant for their ecological values and wildlife habitat. A good source of mapping of clay plain forests is Marc Lapin's mapping, which is not in BioFinder, but which Marc could presumably provide to you (or perhaps you could get from the Natural Heritage Program, or Jens H.).

d. Consider including deer wintering areas, and bear corridors. Since these species move around a lot, covering terrain in more than one town, they would be of regional significance. The higher elevations in the eastern part of Ferrisburgh and adjacent parts of Monkton certainly have a fair amount of bear activity, based on reports we hear from residents and hunters -- but we don't know if that habitat (or corridors?) has been mapped.

e. As Kevin Behm mentioned in an email to Craig Heindel dated Jan. 30, 2015, he will "use the most recent ANR data" for whatever "layers" are selected by the Natural Resources committee. That's important, and it's also important to obtain other sources of mapping information, not just ANR's.

3. We thanked Jens for his very useful and informative presentation and information, and he left.

4. Craig will circulate the draft recommendations regarding the ACRPC (above) for CC members' review, and then he will send to ACRPC and our town reps before March 11.

C. Town Plan

1. Craig will contact Bob Beach or Ken Wheeling to ask if they could provide the draft text of the Town Plan to us soon, so we can begin our review – even if the Land Use Map is not finalized yet.

D. Possible Vision Statement

1. Jen Cirillo offered to check some other towns' CC vision statements for our consideration.

E. Educational workshops sponsored by our Conservation Commission

1. Possibly Jim Andrews on reptiles and amphibians, including Ferrisburgh Central School presentation and/or field trip this spring (vernal pool timing).

The January, 2015 meeting notes were moved to accept.

No other business was discussed and the meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm. The next scheduled meeting is March 10, 2015.

Respectfully submitted,
Craig Heindel, Chair