

WESTMINSTER CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Meeting, Thursday, 2/26/26 at 7:00 P.M

In person: Westminster Institute

To join by Zoom, contact

westminstervtconservation@gmail.com

1. Call to Order: Meeting called to order at 7:06 pm. Present: Tatiana Schreiber (chair), Rachael Shaw(secretary), Kestrel Craig (treasurer), Jim Calchera, Amy Moreland

2. Adjustments to Agenda: Add in discussion of Green Up Day to Other business.

3. Acceptance of Minutes: 1/22/26 – 6 min

Minutes read and accepted by unanimous consent.

4. Communications and Public Comment:

a) Email communications –Comments from Public for 2.26.26 meeting (excluding newsletter reports that Amy read)

- i. From Margo Ghia Thursday, March 12th. Need to register. (see email from 2.26) Regional CC meeting (bi-annual) to be combined with listening session on VT Conservation Plan: In-Person Vermont Conservation Plan Discussion hosted by Windham Regional Commission Thursday, March 12, 5:30pm – 8pm Bellows Falls Opera House, Lower Theater (7 The Square, Bellows Falls, VT) Heavy hors d'oeuvres will be served. Engage in discussion, ask questions, and share your perspectives on helping Vermont prioritize an actionable plan. She asks that we share updates in email since we won't have much time to talk, she'll compile a list of updates. Since no time to talk now, please send suggestions for what to include to Tatiana to compile and send to Margot. mghia@windhamregional.org
- ii. AVCC is also asking the CC to fill out a survey in response to their own listening session on the conservation plan. See email from 2.24: please set aside some time to read the Vermont Conservation Plan's Draft Expanded Framework and share your questions, comments and concerns through this survey: <https://forms.gle/0syJvstmU5HDkkaa6>. Not only will this feedback help the VCP team improve future drafts - a finalized plan is due to the legislature this summer - but it will also give AVCC a better sense of what resources the Westminster conservation commission needs to achieve this ambitious vision for statewide conservation. Every respondent

will automatically be entered into a raffle to win an AVCC t-shirt. Please respond by Monday, March 2nd!

- iii. Free online course on Forest pests. Course Duration: March 8 – May 2, 2026 Weekly webinars, Wednesdays, 7:00 - 8:00 pm Register by March 1st. Register here: <http://vtcommunityforestry.org/pests>. See email 2.17 from Vermont Community Forestry in “upcoming events” label
- iv. Brenna from Protect Our Wildlife asks for folks to contact legislators about H.758 which would prohibit anticoagulant rodenticides and other types of rodenticides, while still allowing limited use during legitimate agricultural, environmental, or public health emergencies. The bill also promotes safer, more effective approaches rooted in Integrated Pest Management (IPM). She lists legislators to contact. See email 2.14.26
- v. Coverts Cooperator Trainings – one in Marlboro in April. Email 2.11 from Lisa Sausville: Apply for one of the 2026 Cooperator Training! Space is limited. Spring Training: April 24-26 at Potash Hill, Marlboro, VT
Fall Training: August 28-30 Kehoe Conservation Camp, Castleton, VT Join to learn about Vermont’s wildlife and stewarding woodlands now and into the future. Connect with others doing the same and learn ways to share what you have learned. This program connects you with resource professionals, landowners and others while learning how you can improve woodlands and share in your community. Apply online, visit their website at www.vtcoverts.org or contact Lisa Sausville lisa@vtcoverts.org. The program is free but requires a \$100 deposit that is refundable upon completion of the course. If this is a hardship contact Lisa.
- vi. Email from Isabel Bowman, 2.9.26 WCNRCD Plant sale ordering open! Online ordering is now open for the 2026 Windham County Natural Resources Conservation District Plant Sale! Please visit the plant sale website for more information and to place an order. The pick up day will be held on Saturday, May 2nd at Green Mountain Orchards in Putney, Vermont.
- vii. AVCC Tiny Grants info, email from 2.9 moved to AVCC resources label.
- viii. See email from Emily Ruff (VT Fish and Wildlife) 2.6 about Vermont Wildlife Action Plan. They were asking for feedback with deadline tomorrow for comments on this 10 year plan. Sorry I didn’t forward this sooner. It’s a long draft. If you have time, see this email for more info.

b) Amy’s reports on Newsletters received:

1. Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program's You've Got TREEMail, 2/25/26

Funding/Awards

- a. Community Tree Fund - Apps due March 27, 2026: Mini grants (\$500 - \$1500) for small-scale tree planting - funder is VT Electric Power Company
- b. Check Out Forestry - Apps due March 27, 2026: Supports public library partnership combining tree stewardship with community engagement (\$5000 available)
- c. Vermont Tree Steward Awards - nominations due March 27, 2026; recognizes state's urban and community forestry champions

2. Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC), 1/23/26. Highlights, "3 Things":

- a. New Forest & Wildlife Program Director: Dr. Tara Miller
- b. VNRC releases legislative priorities: advance renewable energy, reduce energy bills, hold polluters accountable for the damages their products have caused, and do our part to combat the increasingly costly climate crisis.
- c. Analysis of Governor Scott's FY27 budget: VNRC expresses concern over lack of structural solutions to climate and environmental pressures.

3. Connecticut River Conservancy (CRC), 2/19/26

- a. CRC awarded a National Fish & Wildlife Foundation grant supporting expansion of stormwater project development across VT & NH.
- b. CRC publishes new Strategic Plan for Protecting Our Living Watershed, outlining longterm habitat restoration and watershed resilience priorities
- c. Flood Safety Act resources shared, including webinar recordings and updates on statewide hazardmitigation efforts.

4. Vermont Energy and Climate Action Network (VECAN), Feb 23, 2026 Highlights:

- a. Energy Action Network is soliciting feedback on Vermont Annual Progress Report — invites suggestions for data improvements and accessibility
- b. VCRD 30th Anniversary Storytelling Project collecting community success stories from towns engaged in resilience and revitalization efforts

5. Upcoming Events (Across all newsletters):

- a. March 4: Webinar: Restoring Abundance & Conserving Rarity
- b. March 8 – May 2: Vermont Forest Pest First Detectors (Virtual Training)
- c. March 11: VECAN's winter webinar series, via zoom at 12pm, focused on Act 181, the overhaul to Act 250, and Vermont's planning framework for coordinating state, regional and municipal land use. More info coming soon.
- d. March 18: New England Society of American Foresters Winter Meeting
- e. March 30: EAN's Heat Pump Improvement Webinar, 12pm, register here.
- f. April 8, 11am–3pm: Tree Nuisance Framework Training, Bennington
- g. April 23: Vermont Forest Health Meeting, Randolph Center
- h. April 30: Wild & Scenic Film Festival (Bellows Falls): Volunteer support needed. If you are interested in helping, please email Bay Holmes at bholmes@ctriver.org.
- i. May 28: Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Conference, Randolph

c) Rockingham CC minutes report - Minutes from RCC February 9 meeting not available online and were not emailed to the CC. The agenda items were not particularly relevant to our CC this month.

5. Unfinished Business (Discussion / Action) –

a) winter tracking event report - successful event held at the Greenwood Farm with 5 guests plus 3 CC members. The group saw tracks of opossum, vole, gray squirrel, female mink, coyote, and an actual bald eagle circled overhead looking down at a strip of open water. Perfect weather and the energetic presence of two bright kids enhanced the experience. Rachael will develop a list of people who are interested in being on a list for future events.

b) Report on Conservation Plan listening session -Amy attended a Zoom session and prepared the following report, summarized for the CC:

- AVCC presented. 27 participants (3 were facilitators)
- March 31: Comment period for this draft: Vermont Conservation Plan website: <https://vermontconservationplan.com/>
- June 30: This Conservation Plan will be submitted to VT legislature
- Top challenges from poll from various CCs:
 - Challenges from boards: Selectboard, capacity, time, membership, deer

- Resources needed: volunteers, recruitment, community messaging/engagement
- Vision and Goals of Act 59: Community Resilience & Biodiversity Protection Act
 - The vision of the State of Vermont is to maintain an ecologically functional landscape that sustains biodiversity, maintains landscape connectivity, supports watershed health, promotes climate resilience, supports working farms and forests, provides opportunities for recreation and appreciation of the natural world, and supports the historic settlement pattern of compact villages surrounded by rural lands and natural areas.
 - It is the goal of the State that 30 percent of Vermont's total land area shall be conserved by 2030, and 50 percent of the State's total land area shall be conserved by 2050. The Secretary of Natural Resources shall lead the effort in achieving these goals. The land conserved shall include State, federal, municipal, and private land.
 - Reaching 30 percent by 2030 and 50 percent by 2050 shall include a mix of ecological reserve areas, biodiversity conservation areas, and natural resource management areas. In order to support an ecologically functional and connected landscape with sustainable production of natural resources and recreational opportunities, the approximate percentages of each type of conservation category shall be guided by the principles of conservation science and the conservation targets within Vermont Conservation Design, prioritizing ecological reserve areas to protect highest priority natural communities and maintain or restore old forests.
- This Conservation Plan draft is the ROADMAP to meet the goals of Act 59 ^^^^
- Here are the questions the listening session was looking to tackle:
 - Out of all of the pathways and actions listed in this plan, what's an issue or idea that jumps out at you and/or excites you?
 - What is something you would like to see in the plan but that you haven't seen so far?
 - Is there anything in the plan that you don't understand?
 - Which pathways or actions would you like to see prioritized? Why?
 - Given the realities of limited capacity and funding, where do you see the greatest need for more state investment? Where do you see opportunities for more efficient collaboration, both at the state level and in your region?

- What resources does your conservation commission need to do this work?
- Some concerns from the break-out group in Zoom:
 - The big issue in the state right now is to find where to put housing projects, hence the executive order to allow housing in unmapped class two wetlands. How can we balance conservation with the push for housing?
 - All of the goals and objectives sound good, but the group was not sure how implementation would be assured. The group also didn't see how this can be fine-tuned to the specific needs/concerns for each town
 - The group felt that the overall language of the draft was difficult to share with community members who are not already plugged in to the conservation community

Resources shared:

- Map of Vermont's Biophysical Regions: https://geodata.vermont.gov/datasets/c424b27d80ff42728a9707cb9674bddf_184/explore?locationD.156863%2C-72.726118%2C9
- Vermont Conservation Design (VCD): <https://www.vtfishandwildlife.com/conservation/vermont-conservation-design>
- BioFinder: <https://anrmaps.vermont.gov/websites/BioFinder4/>
 - The VCD/BioFinder can be used to identify and map out the highest priority ecological features in a town.
- Here are some forest block and habitat connectivity resources that might come in handy for the town plan rewrite: Act 171 Guidance: <https://anr.vermont.gov/sites/anr/files/conservation/planning/documents/guidance/Act171Guidance.pdf>
- Community Strategies for Vermont's Forests and Wildlife: <https://vnrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/VNRC-Forestland-Conservation-10-1-links.pdf>
- Read the section on natural resource inventories (NRIs) in the AVCC's Conservation Commission Handbook: <https://vtconservation.com/handbook/chapter6/#SixThree>
- “For the Future of Your Forest: A Vermont Guide to Legacy Planning”, developed by VWA and VT Coverts, is a great resource for landowners navigating the succession planning process. You can find it at <https://vermontwoodlands.org/for-the-future-of-your-forest-a-vermont-guide-to-legacy-planning>

- The VNRC town plan information on the state's Municipal Planning Data Center: <https://stateplanningdata.vermont.gov/>. It's not always accurate, but it's a good place to get an idea of which towns are working on rewrites. Action items for WCC to consider:
- Submit comments: <https://vermontconservationplan.com/vcp/framework-jan26/> Attend another Stakeholder Feedback/Listening Session
- Later this month, the “Stewardship Guide for Vermont Forestland Owners” - which provides an overview of the suite of management and conservation options that exist to promote healthy forests and sound stewardship - will also be made available for CCs to share with local landowners.

c) Town Plan/CC input process – Mike McConnell joined our meeting as a guest to talk about the Town Plan process. He will send several documents to our gmail account that are relevant to this process and asked that we comment on them as soon as possible. He will be working on the Town Plan throughout the summer. He stressed that recommendations in the Town Plan should be very specific. He offered to come back to another meeting; he will try for the April 23 meeting. There will be listening sessions coming up to focus on three topics: Conservation/Flood Resilience, Housing, and Economic Development. The components of the Town Plan that the CC will be most likely to contribute to include the Natural Resources section and the Flood Resilience section.

d) CC funding sources (report on other CCs) - 6 or 7 towns provided information to an AVCC survey on this. The budgets vary between \$0 and upwards of \$50,000. Some towns who are interested in buying land set up a separate fund for buying land: they receive funding from grants, fund-raising and some money comes from the town, with that amount varying widely.

e) Follow-up re DEC watershed planning- postponed to next meeting

f) road salt - testing kits - Rachael ordered a kit from Salt Watch and showed it to the group. Others could order them if they are interested. Tatiana noted that there is a bill in the legislature concerning road salt. It just passed in the Senate. <https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2026/Docs/BILLS/S-0218/S-0218%20As%20passed%20by%20the%20Senate%20Official.pdf>

6. New Business:

a) Grant Development -

1. AVCC Tiny Grant (due April 11). Another mini grant is due March 27. Tatiana made a motion that Tatiana, Amy and Jim will form a subcommittee for working on mini grants. Rachael seconded. Motion passed unanimously. They will meet to review this application and any others

coming up soon, determine a project and develop a proposal for the AVCC tiny grant and potentially another application.

7. Other Business: Green Up Day discussion. The CC was asked if it again wanted to coordinate Green Up Day in Westminster. Rachael and Kestrel agreed to work on Green Up Day. Tatiana will let Kelley know. Kestrel offered to print out the recruiting poster to bring to Town Meeting.

8. Date of Next Meeting: March 26th, 7 pm at the Westminster West Library

9. Adjournment at 8:42 pm

Minutes respectfully submitted by

Rachael Shaw, secretary