

# Starksboro Conservation Commission January Meeting Notes

Monday, Jan. 26, 2026

Starksboro Public Library. 5:30 – 7 pm

Attending: Jan McCleery, Robert Turner, Margi Gregory, Jennifer Lovett, Alice Weston, Cathy Townsend, Jean Tufts

- Visitor's comments. Jean Tufts. Member of public listening in.
- Cathy Townsend will speak to us regarding the VT Reads events around "The Light Pirate", a book on climate change. The SCC will be co-sponsoring the events.
  - Cathy is looking for a partner from CC to partner with the library. Will be applying for grants. "The Light Pirate" is a book set in the near future. It's a story of survival and resilience through a hurricane, aftermath and impacts of climate change - through themes of power, water, light and time. 2025 book of the year Vermont Humanities. Library has multiple copies. Book club in March with possible additional events, looking for partner(s) in the work. Motion to partner with the library on The Light Partner project by Jan. Second by Jan. no discussion, passed unanimously. Jan will be the contact for the SCC with Cathy.
- Minutes from [Oct](#) and [Nov](#).2025. Invasive removal [plan](#) 10/5 with college students.
  - Discuss edits after minutes sent out early. Motion from Alice to accept October, seconded by Jan. no discussion, accepted unanimously. Motion from Jan with Robert corrections, second from Jennifer, no discussion, accepted unanimously.
- The Cota Field grant. Recently the first meeting to discuss the engineering design to mitigate undue wetness at Cota Field took place with only the engineers and representatives of the LCA in attendance. Peg Casey, Louis Dupont and Chris Runcie were part of the process for a number of years. Peg and Louis have been invited to attend our meeting. In order for this grant to work for the families of Starksboro, we need to review the map, discuss alternatives, increase the number of involved Starksboro residents, and decide on how the SCC might best be involved.
  - Peg and Louis not in attendance. Robert looked over the design. The Selectboard was in favor of developing a grant to do the work. The work is being proposed. Mostly subsurface drainage to try to make the field dryer. Specific proposal about trench drainage and moving water away from the road. Robert's impression was it didn't involve a lot of major work. Jan noted that the map may have showed the trail in incorrect position, but this may also be the future design of the trail. Margi found the images to be difficult to see and interpret. LCA looking for SCC input into developing a rain garden. Peg had let Margi know she wants the SCC to hear about an alternative plan which would be cheaper and preferable - move the entrance driveway further east and enlarge the ditch. Margi feels it is late in the process to change planning. Jan talked with Louis and a member of the sports committee at recycling about it. When Denny was clearing the ditch last spring, they encountered piping and the field has been dry all summer. Peg and Denny

and someone from the sports committee needs to work with the LCA around the work that has already been done. It was recommended this discussion happen at a meeting with LCA and the engineers. Kate from LCA said there would be winter and spring meetings to review the design of the project. They still need a grant for construction. Robert proposes that one person from SCC be the contact for this, and get a look at the plans before any meeting with the engineers. Peg, Louis and Chris Runcy have all been at the meetings with engineers and any alternative proposal should be floated at a meeting. Many options have been considered, and put through consideration of likelihood of flooding in the area. Margi asked Jean Tuft if she would be interested in attending the LCA meetings about proposals. She said yes, and that she would be interested in the rain garden proposal. Jean described her professional background, a certified wetlands scientist working in Virginia. Margi will include Jean and SCC with any communications with Kate Kelly. Robert noted that our official role with Cota field is the contact with Vermont Land Trust. We have a responsibility that VLT is kept in the loop on any work on the lands. Easement indicates that any work has to be approved by VLT. The ballfield conditions are different than the rest of the Cota Lands, and Robert thinks it will be fine as long as there is streamside protection. Margi will remind Kate that the VLT needs to be kept in the loop.

- Update from Robert on municipal planning grant.
  - An effort with the planning commission. After initial hearings on bylaws changes, Robert suggested applying for municipal planning grant to develop Community Housing Trust. Consultant with Champlain Housing Trust doing literature review, case study analysis, and is writing a document for a road map for moderate income housing in Starksboro. That document will be share with planning commission. Need to have two public meetings about discussion of housing generally within context of town plan, with the document being a tool for future planning. The bylaws amendment process is being redone, hearings and submission to Select Board being redone by Planning Commission. Steve Rooney, zoning administrator, has suggested a number of changes. They are next setting up two public hearings. Planning Commission meeting this Thursday will include discussion around revising town plan which expires in August. Can't pass zoning bylaws without a current town plan. Last meeting we discussed writing a letter to the planning commission suggesting waiting to revise bylaws before town plan. There is an article on town meeting warning about having any changes to bylaws and town plan require public meeting and vote. Municipal planning grant expires in June, so public meetings need to happen soon.
  
- Zoning revisions. A petition requesting a town vote was circulated and garnered sufficient signatures. Where do things stand now?
  - Plenty of signature to be on the town meeting warning. Town report coming out in the next couple weeks.

- Pete Antos-Ketcham will represent the SCC at a gathering on Friday of this week sponsored by the Center for Community Engagement at Middlebury College. Hopefully we can get a short report. Our plan is to organize a spring student volunteer schedule in March with the CCE.
  - Pete attended this last week. Jan will be in touch with him for an update.
  
- Jennifer Lovett will report on the first organizational meeting to collaborate with other local CC's to create a new monthly radio program.
  - Jennifer went to a zoom meeting. In very early planning stages. New Haven, Lincoln, Monkton, Bristol, Starksboro all involved. Vision for the radio station laid out: connecting people to the community and nature through lively conversations. Looking to set up monthly hour long programs from towns, 2-3 shows per year per town. Ideas were discussed. No studio space, would be done with remote radio kits until studio space located in Bristol. Discussion around involving Mt. Abe High School students. Idea of a soft launch in April, streamed on the web. Suggested that each town try to come up with three ideas before the next meeting in March. Discussed ideas of use of conserved land, town forest, history of Hillsboro, script from Art and Soul, Bill McKibbin, beavers and wetlands, Lewis Creek and Starksboro flooding and management - Kristin Underwood, municipal housing grant, Lewis Creek Association work in the area, history, use and preservation of Cota conserved land, master naturalist program, a forest anthropologist interview, involving students from Robinson or Mt. Abe, invasives status and work in Starksboro
  
- Additional topic - continuing the program started in December looking at Vermont Conservation Design, should we try to move forward with another presentation style conservation commission meeting with topic focused on Vermont Conservation Design, and Act 181 and how it's being integrated with Vermont Conservation Design to develop Tier III areas. Robert willing to try to pull a presentation together with particular images/maps. Robert would prepare a powerpoint that could be shared on zoom. Could also include status of town plan revision, serve as extra vehicle to get word out about town plan revision. Jean added that if more people knew about what planning changes would do to places around Starksboro, that it may serve to drive future planning. Robert noted that Act 171 requires more discussion around habitat and impact of planning. We could use this discussion to get input to draft sections of plan around Act 171. Robert will put thought into a presentation for our next meeting on February 23rd just prior to Town Meeting.
  
- Advocating for the environment is a primary goal of conservation commissions. We will create a document identifying best practices for habit enhancement on conserved lands to share with our DRB, SB and PC.
  - This is something we have discussed in last meetings. Related to Act 171 discussion. The PC is the correct audience for this. Conserved lands are the Cota Lands and Town Forest. We also have opinions around other development on private land. Question raised about land maintenance beyond mowing on ball

field. Are there any pesticides or fertilizers used? Robert will look at the VLT easement.

- Discussion about whether we should communicate with the state about mowing state roads before poison parsnip goes to seed.
  - This could be done, whether the state department of transportation would listen. This would be for Rts 116 and 17. Could also communicate with town about town roads. VTRANS, Jennifer's neighbor works for them and will make this communication and find out what the policy and timeline is and whether it can be altered. The mowing should happen by mid June for this purpose.

Next meeting February 23rd from 5:30-7:00. Meeting adjourned at 7:02 pm.

Minutes submitted by Alice Weston