

**Brandon Planning Commission  
Wildlife Corridor Hearing  
April 21, 2014**

**Planning Commission Members Present:** Anne Bransfield, Jeff Guevin, Linda Stewart, Tracy Wyman

**Others present:** Dennis Reisenweaver, Freddi Schneider, Paul Gladding, Dolores Furnari, Eric Mallory, Bernie Carr, Gary Meffe, Liz Gregorik, Lou Faivre, John Meyers, Dale Knapp, Janet Mondlak, Craig Johnson, Katie Johnson, Doug Bailey, Jerry Calsetta, Raymond Rovi, Ray Jolst, Betsy Quigley, Edna Sutton, Joan Rowe, Steve Schild – GIS Manager – Regional Planning Commission

**Call to Order:**

Anne Bransfield opened the Wildlife Corridor hearing at 7:04PM.

**Introductions:**

The hearing was open to discuss the proposed Wildlife Corridor ordinance to take input from the public. Steve Schild of the Regional Planning Commission was present to provide mapping information.

**Questions/General Discussion:**

Steve Schild provided an overview of the Wildlife Corridor that runs through the northeastern states and into Canada. The southern half of Brandon is where the Wildlife Corridor is located. Mr. Schild provided information on conserved lands, wetlands, deer runs, and black bear habitats. The corridor has been studied and it connects the Adirondacks to the Green Mountains and up through to Nova Scotia. Large mammals travel this specific route, going back and forth, migrating in terms of procreation and they forge and live on things that are in their path. They move between large green areas such as hedge rows or trees. There is a specific route around Hawk Hill and research has been done regarding this area. It was reiterated the corridor is like a road between two towns that is a stretch of forested areas the animals can travel through to get from the Adirondacks through the Green Mountains. The large mammals have been identified as moose, deer, bear and fisher cats and Brandon has been identified as a critical link. There was a question of who had done the research. The Staying Connected Initiative has provided a lot of information and partners with ANR, the National Fish and Wildlife Service and the Forest Service. This is scientific evidence and the Planning Commission has provided three public forums to discuss this information.

Mr. Reisenweaver stated one of the corridors went along the north boundary near Leicester that does not appear on the map. It was noted there is more information available on the Natural Resource Atlas. Eric Mallory asked how many other towns have done this work. It is unknown how many towns are in the corridor, but it is hoped that Pittsford will also follow suit, as part of the corridor is in that town.

It was questioned what will happen to property values and it was noted that open space has been proven to raise property values. Paul Gladding is looking to purchase acreage that is in this area and these changes would reduce the amount of money he is willing to pay because of the restrictions. He would not pay what they are asking now as the impact will reduce the value of land. Mr. Reisenweaver stated the Planning Commission should look into the effects on property values. There were concerns about more restrictions and it was noted

that people use their common sense and property owners do not want to be mandated. With further restrictions on setbacks, it is thought that it will greatly restrict the size of a house.

Craig Johnson expressed concern about harvesting logs on his own property for firewood to heat his home and it was noted that logging cannot be regulated. Dolores Furnari questioned who will make the ultimate decision regarding the ordinance and was advised the Select Board makes the ultimate decision. The Planning Commission proposes ordinances and holds hearings for a public process, but the Select Board has the final approval. Doug Bailey stated this will take away his rights and will lower the value of his property. Eric Mallory noted he has land that has been in his family for five generations and he needs to be able to harvest timber; and if there is a desire to sell some of his property, he should be able to subdivide.

Paul Gladding stated moose are not going to be impacted greatly, as their presence in this area is minimal, black bear are increasing and white tail deer are regulated by the state. These animals are not being impacted now and he does not see what this is actually amounting to, with the animals not being affected. He does not see that this will benefit the town. It was noted there have been studies done with the animals in question and there is not a large population here, as they are not staying in the area but are moving through the area. It was questioned if anyone has confirmed this and where is the collaboration. There are a number of agencies that have been involved in this study and the Planning Commission will provide this information to the public. There was skepticism concerning the information presented and it was noted this is a very aggressive approach and will make it difficult for people who are just recovering from 2008. Gary Meffe, a conservation biologist, noted he has not worked specifically with this project but advised there has been a study of importance of corridors and the need for animals to move through blocks of land. The ecosystems begin to unravel and it is a firmly established scientific fact that corridors are critical. He has not been involved in this study, but corridors are a fundamental building block around the world for mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles.

Liz Gregorik asked what the next step will be in this process. Anne Bransfield advised there will be a second Planning Commission hearing warned for May 7<sup>th</sup>. The results of the hearings will be evaluated and the Planning Commission will consider how to move forward. Additional information is available regarding Staying Connected through their website, [www.stayingconnectedinitiative.org](http://www.stayingconnectedinitiative.org), and on the Agency of Natural Resources website, <http://www.anr.state.vt.us>. The Planning Commission has been working on this corridor using information from all of the sources noted and public comments from the information sessions held to shape the an ordinance that will be good for the town.

Bernie Carr suggested if the Planning Commission provided information and educational tools to people in the corridor, they would potentially be open to the information on a voluntary basis. It was noted the Fish and Game Wildlife Management group is also a proponent of the corridor. It was noted any agricultural or silva cultures are exempt from municipal zoning controls. Liz Gregorik advised that the State Forestry Service asked them to clear some area to assist with an issue near their property. Jeff Guevin noted the state has the authority to override any local regulations. Ms. Gregorik stated many people are concerned about wildlife and forestry management and it would be helpful to provide more information to people.

Freddi Schneider asked how the rules affect existing situations, as she has a piece of property that has a long driveway and building site cleared and it was noted this would be grandfathered. Jeff Guevin stated the 100-foot road front follows existing patterns and current development is within the 100 feet. Gary Meffe suggested on the process going forward, with many people concerned about property rights, that volunteers work with the Planning Commission to go over the restrictions and get direct input from them to better understand the impacts.

Eric Mallory asked if the Planning Commission has contacted adjoining towns to discuss this ordinance. Jeff Guevin stated the Staying Connected Group has been contacting other towns, but the Brandon Planning Commission has not lobbied the surrounding towns. Mr. Mallory stated to have it work; the corridor would have to be inter-town. Tracy Wyman stated the towns that will likely be interested would be Shoreham and Orwell. John Meyers asked if all towns would have the same restrictions. It was noted that each town's development pattern is different and the restrictions would be customized by town. It was noted that the restrictions should not be greater from one town to another. All principles and concepts are the same, how they are written into the ordinance would be customized. The development of the ordinance is due to the fact there are fewer corridors between major habitats and the concept is to fix the elimination of the corridors. Mr. Schild provided information on the bad areas for crossings. With the Route 7 project, the state will supersede the ordinance, but there is concern that some of the local roads in the corridor will be unable to be updated.

Doug Bailey requested clarification of the ordinance process. It was advised that the Planning Commission will hold two hearings for public input and will then submit their recommendations to the Select Board. The Select Board will then hold two hearings regarding the ordinance. This evening's meeting is the first public hearing on the proposed ordinance. There have been special workshop meetings with both positive and negative feedback received. The hearings are mandated by the state and the Planning Commission holds the hearings once there is a draft to propose to the public. Mr. Bailey is opposed to an ordinance that separates areas of the town and is instituted for only part of the town. He purchased his property 30 years ago and he objects to mandates on specific areas in town, and is concerned with his property being worth less.

Bernie Carr suggested people attend the second hearing after looking into the facts and providing recommendations. A straw poll was taken of the people present who were not in favor of the Wildlife Corridor proposal and with the exception of four people, all present were against the proposal.

Anne Bransfield thanked everyone who attended and invited them to attend the next hearing on May 7<sup>th</sup>.

**Adjournment:**

The hearing was closed at 8:12PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Charlene Bryant  
Recording Secretary