

Energy & Natural Resources Advisory Committee

Minutes

January 24, 2024

Present: Pete Davis, *Town of Jaffrey*; John Kondos, *Monadnock Energy Circuit Rider* (remote); Joe Levesque, Chair, *Town of Alstead*; Amanda Littleton, (*Cheshire County Conservation District*) (remote); Francie Von Mertens, *Town of Peterborough*; Marge Shepardson, *Town of Marlborough*; John Snowdon, *Town of Westmoreland*; Brett Amy Thelen, *Harris Center for Conservation Education*; Ruth Ward, *Town of Stoddard*.

Staff members present: Jason Cooper, *Planner*; Rich Clough, *Office Support Specialist*.

Guests: Evan Abramson, (presenter) *Principal, Landscape Interactions*.

I. Call to Order and Introductions

Chair Joe Levesque called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. and introductions were made.

II. Minutes of October 25, 2023

Motion: To approve the minutes of October 25, 2023.

Motion by Pete Davis, seconded by Francie Von Mertens. Approved by unanimous vote with John Snowdon and Ruth Ward abstaining.

III. Incorporating pollinator habitat and functional ecosystems into development projects

Jason Cooper introduced Evan Abramson, Principal of Landscape Interactions. He provided a description of his company and the work that it provides. Landscape Interactions works on projects which incorporate habitat design, regional planning, landscape management, pollinator-plant species surveys, and ecological site analysis, for the creation, implementation and maintenance of pollinator habitat in a variety of land use scenarios and scales. Evan Abramson explained that he works directly with scientists when developing plans in order to follow best practices. He provided background information regarding environmental effects causing decline in many North American plants, insects, and bird species. He noted that decreasing biodiversity was aggravated through habitat loss, climate change and pollution. Evan Abramson stated that connected ecosystems can help with larger issues, such as increasing local resilience to drought. Furthermore, he provided examples of drought resistant landscape features and noted that carbon storage in the soil can prevent its release in the event of wildfire.

Evan Abramson reported that his company examines the native plant populations at the county level and uses a cross index of plants and pollinators to make recommendations that are most appropriate to the locale. He described the importance of maintaining and increasing the populations of a diverse range of native plant species in order to build resilience to disturbances posed by climate change. Additionally, he explained that cultivars of native plants may have key differences resulting in different ecosystem functions than the original plant. He explained that sourcing native plants can be difficult as there are few suppliers.

Evan Abramson provided examples of some of Landscape Interactions' projects. One of these projects is *Pollinate Now: Bioregional Strategy for Habitat Restoration in the Hudson River Estuary Watershed*. He reported that he examined the regional plan and divided the watershed into 4 sub watersheds to create scalable, replicable plans. He reported that he had initially looked at approximately 18 sites within these sub watersheds before selecting four which provided diversity in the way of size, terrain, and local ecology. The sites are as follows:

1. Riparian - Gardiner, NY, along the Wallkill River.
2. Urban Residential - Kingston, NY, at a YMCA with planters and bee and butterfly lawn.
3. Farmland - Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, at a 14-acre cornfield owned by Bard College.
4. Conservation property and pond restoration - Gallatin, NY

He noted that at these Toolkit sites his team conducted before and after surveys in different seasons to monitor the sites' condition following the work. Survey methods include netting for insects and photos for general condition and plant life. Evan Abramson stated that a report on Best Management Practices (BMP) was created for each project that could be shared with different landowners and adjusted for similar ecological zones. He noted that Geographic Information System (GIS) tools were used to plot out and create maps for the plans. He then shared other projects done in the last five years, including locations in Martha's Vineyard; Lincoln, MA; Wellsley, MA; and the Berkshires.

Evan Abramson explained how Landscape Interactions' work can intersect well with solar installations. He provided an example of a plan for a solar installation in a site that was previously used as farmland. He stated that after noting where the solar arrays would be located, his team determined the best types of plants that would grow to a height 6" less than the lowest height of solar panels so there would be no obstruction of sunlight. He reported that the plants were chosen to promote pollinator habitat, increase soil retention and require little long-term maintenance. He described the process of planting that includes preparing the soil, distributing the seeds, watering, protecting the seeds and a follow-up maintenance and survey schedule. Furthermore, he shared that in the municipality where he resides, the town has passed a zoning ordinance which requires solar installations to include pollinator friendly plantings. Evan Abramson suggested that other municipalities should adopt similar ordinances to promote more pollinator friendly areas in New England.

Chair Levesque asked if there are retail outlets where seed can be purchased? Evan Abramson replied that the Wild Seed Project in Maine and Prairie Moon in Minnesota are excellent sources. John Snowdon asked when is it a good time to seed? Evan Abramson replied that either in the Fall or at Frost-out in Spring. John Snowdon asked if there were size requirements for the spaces that Evan Abramson works with and he replied that he works with residential, non-profit, and commercial entities with spaces of varying sizes. Chair Levesque commented that this type of planning is great for areas around solar panels. Evan Abramson noted that towns should be advised to have ordinances in place that define the type of planting and have an upkeep program defined before a potential energy supplier comes before a board with a proposal. Francie Von Mertens asked what kind of funding is available for the type of surveys, plans and execution that Landscape Interactions does. Evan Abramson replied that grants can come from many sources including conservation groups, state, and federal sources. Amanda Littleton noted that the Cheshire County Conservation District has access and information about grants available to homeowners including the US Department of Agriculture, the NH Moose Plate program, and others. Jason Cooper asked if restrictions scare-off developers. Evan Abramson replied that developers are not as likely to be reluctant if the parameters are clearly defined before any proposals are made. Jason Cooper asked how the plan in NY was funded. Evan Abramson responded that Partners for Climate Action provided funding. Chair Levesque asked what is the typical follow-up period for this program. Evan Abramson replied that surveys are scheduled to occur two years following installation to track results. Francie Von Mertens asked if the Hudson River sites are accessible to the public. Evan Abramson replied

that some are public, and some are private, and that more information is available on the project page on his website <https://www.landscapeinteractions.com/>. He also noted that previous presentations and projects are also available for viewing on the website. Chair Levesque thanked Evan Abramson for his informative presentation.

IV. Partner Updates

Jason Cooper reported that SWRPC was initiating the region's first ever transportation infrastructure vulnerability assessment. The assessment will focus on precipitation-related impacts to publicly owned roads, bridges and culverts and will use the [Federal Highway Administration's Vulnerability Assessment Scoring Tool](#) to organize and weight many factors including asset condition, age, flood history, and probability of being overtopped. Jason Cooper added that SWRPC plans to summarize information about climate and weather hazards relevant to transportation infrastructure and identify both short-term and long-term strategies (including projects) to address vulnerable infrastructure. He also noted that ENRAC members might be asked to participate in an advisory role and to contact him if interested.

Jason Cooper also reported that SWRPC has been approached by the town of Dublin concerning a Brownfields assessment of a landfill at the former town dump with the objective of installing a solar array there.

V. Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for April 24, 2024, at 3:30 p.m.

VI. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rich Clough
Office Support Specialist