

To: The Selectboard

From: Edie Miller

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I have read the proposal to create a conservation commission in town which would assume the duties and responsibilities of the following groups:

- Conservation Fund Advisory Committee (6 members): oversees the Conservation Fund which is used for conservation of important natural resource areas (agricultural, forest, wildlife, natural, recreational).
- Rural Road Vegetation Assessments Committee (8 members): deals with issues related to the management and aesthetics of road corridors.
- Old LaPerle Farm Property Committee (6 members): makes recommendations on uses and management of town-owned former LaPerle property (within the village, between Routes 14 and 2).
- Forest Committee (3 members): manages the town forest and advises Selectboard on forestry-related issues affecting the town.
- East Montpelier Trails, Inc (8 members): a town-affiliated nonprofit that acquires, builds, maintains, and manages a town trail

While the benefits in efficiency of such an approach might seem appealing, I believe there might be important reasons not to take the consolidation path.

Looking at these groups and their charges, I can understand why the proposal to merge into a conservation commission came from members of the Conservation Fund Advisory Committee. Having been part of that group and its chair for many years after its founding, I know that most advisory committee members have an abiding and broad interest in conservation in general. I also can remember the frustration that sometimes arises that there aren't more active projects for the advisory committee to consider.

However, when I look at the other groups, I see very specific issues and projects which appeal to the imagination and the passions of those who chose to become involved. This, I believe, brings strength and vitality to the work of the specific groups. Forming an all-encompassing group with broad responsibilities may simplify communications and make some administrative functions more efficient, but I think the ability to attract enthusiastic volunteers may be compromised.

We are a very small community which has not experienced extraordinary growth in the 45 years I've lived here. Though some laws, processes, rules, and regulations, dictated often at the state level, have become more complicated, in general, the running of this town is still a manageable affair. Our ability to continue to attract willing, dedicated, and knowledgeable volunteers to engage in important town efforts depends on making those effort distinct and readily doable rather than broader, more complex,

and more bureaucratic. Because of our size, the communications between groups should be able to be improved with greater awareness of overlapping responsibilities and simple attention to keeping in touch.

I think East Montpelier has approached growth and change wisely over time, changing certain key positions to reflect the times and changing responsibilities. I believe we have assured we have professional and skilled personnel on whom we can depend. Likewise, the culture of EM, and a large part of what makes it a vital community that people are proud to be part of, is its inclusiveness and the ease with which people can contribute and share their specific skills and interests. I think we may lose an important aspect of our community if we don't continue to encourage and build upon individuals' desires and willingness to contribute in ways significant both to them and to the community.