

Approved Minutes of the
Hartford Conservation Commission
February 7, 2022

Members Present: Jon Bouton, Mary Hutchins, Ted Levin, Katie Mann, Lee Michaelides, Angie Emerson, and chair Tom Kahl.

Staff Present: Planner Matt Osborn.

Others Present: Ben Lay of the Hartford Salamander Team and Selectboard Liaison Dennis Brown.

An entirely remote Conservation Commission Meeting in compliance of the Open Meeting Law was held on Monday, February 7th. Chair Tom Kahl called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and proceeded to read the Remote Meeting Script followed by roll call.

1. **Changes to the Agenda:** Tom Kahl suggested adding the Association of Vermont Conservation Commission Tiny Grant to the agenda. The HCC agreed. Tom asked if there are any other changes to the agenda. There were none.
2. **Approval of Minutes:** Tom Kahl asked if there are any changes to the draft Minutes of the January 3, 2022 HCC Meeting. There were no changes. Tom stated that the minutes are approved as written by unanimous consent.
3. **2022 Conservation Commission Goals & Priorities:** Tom Kahl noted that the HCC developed a list of goals and priorities at last month's HCC meeting. He asked if anyone had additions to the list. There were none. Tom stated we will proceed with these for 2022 and discuss and change if we feel necessary during the year.
4. **Private Landowner Conservation Outreach:** Katie Mann reported that the letters to owners of the next ten highest ranked parcels went out early last month. Matt Osborn noted that he hasn't received any responses to date. Katie noted that she created a list of the next ten highest ranked parcels. She suggested that the letters be sent out in the spring. The HCC agreed. Matt agreed to obtain the span numbers for the parcels.
5. **Hartford Salamander Team:** Tom Kahl welcomed Ben Lay of the Hartford Salamander Team (HST) to the meeting. Ben was present to talk about the HST's work. The HST started two years ago and last year had a training that attracted 65 people. Ben reported that HST currently has a website and Facebook page and an e-mail list of 70 people. During the spring amphibian migration, volunteers are stationed along roads and transport amphibians across roads to wetlands. The spring migration usually occurs when there is a steady rain with night-time temperatures above 40F. Ben noted that it usually occurs 5-10 nights over a 4-6 week period and includes the amphibian migration return to their forest habitat. Volunteers track live and dead amphibians and the data is shared with the North Branch Nature Center, a partner of HST, who has been doing amphibian research for over a decade. Ben stated that the goal is to build a dedicated team of volunteers. He talked about a possible road detour near Lilly Pond but due to an existing detour on Gates Street, area residents weren't supportive of an additional detour.

Tom Kahl noted that Jon Bouton and the HCC sponsors an annual vernal pool walk in the Town Forest each April. Jon stated that he has a permit from the State to trap and release amphibians. He suggested partnering with the HST. Ben agreed.

Tom noted that he and Jon Bouton had performed the Vermont Center for Ecostudies (VCE) Vernal Pool Monitoring program for the vernal pool at the south end of the Hartford Town Forest. But due to

other commitments they would like to pass this monitoring on to others and suggested it could be a partnering effort between the HCC and HST. The monitoring requires two people to make four site visits in a year. Angie Emerson volunteered to participate in the vernal pool monitoring as the HCC's representative and Ben said that he was confident that he could find a HST person to be the second person. Tom will let the Kevin Tolan, the VCE's program coordinator, know.

Ben Lay also noted that he is working on a similar effort documenting fungi.

6. **Town Forest Timber Harvest 1/31 Information Meeting:** Tom Kahl reported that there was a decent turnout for the 1/31 informational meeting on the proposed 2023 timber harvest. He noted that there were a fair number of people who are against the timber harvest. Some recreationists have concerns about the effect on the character of the forest and trails. Others oppose cutting trees due to climate change and their recommendation is to not cut any trees in the Town Forest in order to store carbon. There is also opposition to use the north landing from the two nearest Reservoir Road residents.

The meeting also revealed opposition to creating a new log landing or turnaround and a preference by several residents to use the existing trailhead parking area as a temporary log landing. Matt Osborn noted that parking for recreation is incompatible with a logging operation. Mary Hutchins agreed and noted that logger employees will also be parking there. Katie Mann noted that there are a lot of dog walkers in the Town Forest. She expressed concern about off-leash dogs interfering with the logging operation. Tom added that we have tried to keep the southern portion of the Town Forest open for recreation during the logging operation and we have committed to keeping the VAST main north/south route open as well.

Ted Levin suggested parking at the east end of Kings Highway. Matt responded that trails in the side of the Town Forest will be closed since there will be active logging in the area.

Tom Kahl asked about the possibility of creating a temporary parking area north of the trailhead parking area during logging. Matt Osborn responded that he will discuss with the Department of Public Works.

Jon Bouton stated that there are advantages of having two log landings. First, it will result in shorter distances for the logger to transport logs from the northern and eastern portions of the harvest to the road. . In addition, the bridge for the new logging road wouldn't be needed.

Jon Bouton noted that a mountain biker at the meeting opposed the creation of a wide logging road that would replace the Moose Brook Trail. The logging road is necessary but could eventually become narrower if vegetation is allowed to grow in.

Tom Kahl asked if there was consensus to utilize the existing trailhead parking area as a log landing and to use the north landing. He added that we would need a separate snow mobile trail with fencing for the north/south VAST trail to separate it from the logging operation, and signage showing the designated parking areas and safety policies such as leashing dogs in the landing area.

Jon Bouton made a motion that the HCC strongly recommends proceeding with the timber harvest using both the north landing and the trailhead parking area as a separate log landing and create a temporary parking area along Reservoir Road north of the trailhead parking area. The motion was seconded by Mary Hutchins and approved by a 7 to 0 vote. Matt Osborn agreed to talk to the Town Administration about the changes to the plans.

The HCC agreed that there would be a single response to hardcopy and written concerns about the timber harvest received during and after the Informational Meeting.

8. Town Forest:

- a. Memorandum of Understanding with the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association: Matt Osborn reported that he met with Tom and members of the UVMBA to discuss revisions to the MOU. Revisions were made and Matt is awaiting review by Planning Director Lori Hirshfield and Town Manager Tracy Yarlott-Davis.
- b. Discussion about the Wildlife Habitat Assessment: It was agreed to talk about this at the March 7th HCC Meeting.
- c. February 12th Town Forest Snowshoe Outing: Angie and Ted will be leading the snowshoe outing on Saturday February 12th at 10:00 am in the Town Forest. The theme of the outing will be winter birds. Matt Osborn will work on promotion.
- d. Trail Signs: Tom Kahl reported that Tim Schaal is working with boy scouts on building trail signs for the Town Forest trail maps.

9. American Kestrel Nest Boxes: Ted Levin reported that he will be erecting a Kestrel nest box in a tree adjacent to a meadow on Kings Highway on March 1st. He plans to erect boxes at other locations in Hartford in the future.

10. Wetlands Complaint: Matt Osborn reported that he heard from the Regional State Wetlands Specialist Rebecca Chalmers regarding a wetlands complaint made by a Wilder resident last summer. The wetland is a Class 2 wetland and Rebecca determined that there was cutting in the buffer area. Rebecca will examine aerial photos of the historic vegetation and contact the property owner. Matt agreed to keep the HCC informed.

11. Climate Action Plan Steering Committee: Lee Michaelides reported that the Climate Action Plan (CAP) Steering Committee is reviewing the CAP and focusing on low-hanging fruit at this time. Recommendations from the Steering Committee will be presented to the Selectboard in the near future. Lee also noted that the Steering Committee will be discussing the planned Town Forest timber harvest. Lee agreed to let the HCC know if it would be helpful for the HCC to attend a meeting to discuss the timber harvest.

12. AVCC Tiny Grant: Tom Kahl reported that the annual Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions has announced the 2022 AVCC Tiny Grant program. Grant Applications are due April 8th and range between \$250 and \$600. Tom asked if the HCC has any ideas for a grant application. Being none, Tom said we will discuss the item at the March 7th HCC Meeting.

13. Announcements: Dennis Brown announced that this will be his last HCC meeting as Selectboard Liaison since he is not seeking re-election next month. He stated that it has been a pleasure working with the Conservation Commission and he noted that he has learned a great deal. Tom Kahl thanked Dennis for his service to the Town.

14. Next Meeting: Tom Kahl reported that the next HCC meeting is scheduled for Monday, March 7th at 7:00 p.m. Matt noted that the meeting may be a remote meeting.

15. Adjournment: Jon Bouton made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mary Hutchins and approved. The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

16. Meeting Action Items:

- a. Matt agreed to obtain the span numbers for the next ten highest ranked natural resource parcels.
- b. The HCC agreed to partner with the Hartford Salamander Team on the April vernal pool walk.
- c. Tom will let the VCE's program coordinator, Kevin Tolan know that Angie Emerson and a HST volunteer will assume the monitoring of the vernal pool at the south end of the Hartford Town Forest.
- d. Matt stated that he will discuss options for temporary parking on Reservoir Road during the timber harvest with the Department of Public Works.
- e. The HCC agreed that there would be a single response to hardcopy and written concerns from the public on the timber harvest.
- f. It was agreed to discuss the Town Forest Wildlife Habitat Assessment at the March 7th HCC meeting.
- g. Matt agreed to discuss with Town administration the revised Memorandum of Understanding with the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association.
- h. Angie and Ted agreed to lead a February 12th snowshoe outing in the Town Forest. Matt agreed to work on promotion.
- i. Ted Levin reported that he will be erecting a Kestrel nest box in a tree adjacent to a meadow on Kings Highway
- j. Matt agreed to keep the HCC and resident who made the wetlands complaint apprised about the State Wetlands Biologist review.
- k. Tom said we will discuss the AVCC grant at the March 7th HCC Meeting.
- l. Lee agreed to let the HCC know if it would be helpful for the HCC attend a meeting with the Climate Action Plan Committee to discuss the timber harvest.