

Draft Minutes of the
Hartford Conservation Commission
March 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: Selectboard Liaison Mary Erdei.

A hybrid Conservation Commission Meeting in compliance of the Open Meeting Law was held on Monday, March 7th in Room 312 of the Hartford Town Hall located at 171 Bridge Street, White River Junction. Chair Tom Kahl called the meeting to order at 7:07 p.m. and proceeded to read the Hybrid Meeting Script followed by roll call. He welcomed Mary Erdei as the new Selectboard Liaison.

1. **Changes to the Agenda:** Tom Kahl asked if there are any 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 February 7, 2022 HCC Meeting. There were no changes. Tom stated that the minutes are approved as written by unanimous consent.
3. **AVCC Tiny Grant:** Tom Kahl reported that the annual Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions 2022 AVCC Tiny Grant program is open. Grant Applications are due April 8th and range between \$250 and \$600. Tom noted that the HCC received AVCC grants the last two years to treat invasive plants in the David Chang Conservation Area and Town Forest and to assist the Hartford Salamander Team with the funds to the North Branch Nature Center for training and data collection. Tom asked if the HCC has any ideas for a grant application. Jon Bouton suggested educational signs for the Town Forest. He agreed to compile a list of topics and get an estimate. Matt Osborn noted that grant applications demand staff time to write the application and to administer the grant. He suggested given the small amount for signs that the HCC consider utilizing the HCC budget.
4. **Town Forest Timber Harvest Update:** Tom Kahl reported that following the 1/31 public informational meeting on the timber harvest, he met with Matt Osborn, Planning Director Lori Hirshfield and former Conservation Commission chair and former Selectboard chair Chuck Wooster and they recommended talking to the Climate Action Plan Steering Committee and Tree Board to present the HCC reasoning behind the timber harvest. Jon & Tom spoke to the Climate Action Plan Steering Committee on March 2nd. They will talk to the Tree Board on March 15th. The next step would be to present to the Selectboard.

Matt Osborn reported that he will be meeting this week with Department of Public Works Assistant Director Jeremy Delisle about the use of the Trailhead Parking Area as a log landing and about creating a temporary parking area during the timber harvest.

5. **Integrated Town Forest Management Plan; Wildlife Habitat Assessment:** To acquaint Mary Erdei with this subject Tom Kahl gave a brief overview of the HCC's interest in creating an integrated management plan for the Town Forest. Angie Emerson noted that the goal is to create a succinct summary of each plan. New HCC member Ted Levin reported that he read the Wildlife Habitat Assessment (WHA). He questions the value of creating additional early successional habitat since a great deal of it already exists in the area. He also questions why a number of species were selected as species to encourage since they are extremely unlikely to reside in the Town Forest now or in the future. Jon Bouton responded that the most important part of the report is the first 16 pages that include a summary, scale and habitat diversity, recreation and habitat features. Jon also noted that the

adjacent Hurricane Forest Wildlife Refuge was removed from active forest management as well as some sensitive areas of the Town Forest. He noted that the idea is to create a resilient forest and sequestering carbon.

Mary Hutchins stated that she thinks the most important part of the WHA is the recommendation “limiting human factors contributing to wildlife presence and habitat use.” She also noted that the WHA report is 11 years old and that we should take parts of the report that are feasible.

Katie Mann said the HCC needs to figure out what we want to manage for. She noted that the HCC could undertake an update of the WHA. Jon Bouton agreed.

Tom Kahl described the balancing component of the Recreation Management Plan process noting that the Town Forest is neither a wilderness nor a park. He stated that we should use the best available information available.

Angie Emerson made a motion not to include the WHA in the consolidated plan. The motion was seconded by Katie Mann. The motion passed 7 to 0.

Angie Emerson stated that the HCC will review the Bird Habitat Assessment at the April 4th meeting. Tom Kahl requested a hard copy of the Assessment.

6. Town Forest:

- a. Memorandum of Understanding with the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association: Matt Osborn reported that he met with Planning Director Lori Hirshfield to review the MOU and had revisions. Matt reviewed the revisions with Tom and sent them to the UVMBA for their review. Matt agreed to continue to work with Town administration and the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association on the revised Memorandum of Understanding.
- b. February 12th Town Forest Snowshoe Outing: Tom Kahl reported that the snowshoe outing was well-attended and went extremely well. He thanked Angie and Ted for leading the event.
- c. Town Forest Interpretive Signs: Jon Bouton stated that he would like to erect educational signs for forest management activities. As previously noted, he agreed to compile a list of topics and seek a cost estimate

7. 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 this week.

8. Hartford Salamander Team: Angie Emerson had volunteered to lead the Vt. Center for Ecostudies (VCE) monitoring for the vernal pool at the south end of the Hartford Town Forest and has communicated this with Kevin Tolan the VCE coordinator. She will be getting the monitoring equipment for this pool from Jon Boutin. If the Hartford Salamander Team (HST) does not provide a person to be the second counter Tom will assist Angie.

Tom noted that at the 2/7/22 HCC meeting Ben Lay of the Hartford Salamander Team (HST) agreed to team-up with the HCC on the annual April vernal pool walk. Jon Bouton will coordinate the planning of this event with Ben.

Ben also is interested in partnering with the HCC on regular educational events. Ted agreed to talk with Ben to discuss potential topics, speakers, and funding sources for the HST.

Tom Kahl noted that last year, the HCC applied for and was awarded a \$300 Association of Vermont Conservation Commission's Tiny Grant to cover the HST for their work with the North Branch Nature Center (NBNC), who provides training and data collection for the HST. Tom noted that the HCC could use their funds to cover NBNC costs for the HST this year. There was discussion. Mary Hutchins made a motion to use \$300 of HCC funds to cover NBNC costs for the HST this year. The motion was seconded by Katie Mann and approved by a 6 to 1 vote.

9. **Private Landowner Conservation Outreach:** Tom Kahl gave an overview about the HCC program to reach out to Hartford property owners who have land that ranks high from a natural resource perspective. To date, letters have gone out to 30 property owners. The HCC plans to send letters to the next ten property owners. Matt reported that he obtained the span numbers for the parcels and noted that he will discuss two of the properties with Tom and Katie. At Ted's request Tom sent Ted a copy of the original parcel evaluation spreadsheet developed by former HCC member Karen Douville in 2016 on 3/10/22.
10. **Climate Action Plan Steering Committee:** Lee Michaelides reported that Jon Bouton and Tom Kahl attended the 3/2 Climate Action Plan (CAP) Steering Committee meeting to discuss the Town Forest timber harvest. Tom noted that it was a lengthy conversation and resulted in no clear consensus from the Committee regarding support or opposition about the timber harvest.
11. **Linking Lands Alliance Maps:** Matt Osborn reported that former HCC member Karen Douville donated Linking Lands Alliance (LLA) maps to the HCC. Tom Kahl noted that Karen offered to talk to the HCC about the background and work of the LLA. It was agreed to see if there is room on the April 4th agenda.
12. **Outstanding Budget Items:** Tom Kahl noted that with the Town budget freeze, the HCC had to put on hold its interest in obtaining boundary markers for the David Chang Conservation Area in Quechee and the HCC awards plaque. Matt Osborn noted the balance of the HCC budget. Tom noted that we will need funds for supplies for the spring Trails Day event. It was agreed to hold-off purchasing the boundary markers and awards plaque until the Trails Day event supplies have been obtained.
13. **Announcements:** There were no announcements.
14. **Next Meeting:** Tom Kahl reported that the next HCC meeting is scheduled for Monday, April 4th at 7:00 p.m. Matt noted that the meeting will be a hybrid meeting, in-person with remote access.
13. **Upcoming Events:**
 - a. April Vernal Pool Walk: Date to be decided at 4/4 HCC Meeting after Jon discusses with Ben of the Hartford Salamander Team
 - b. Green-Up Day: Saturday, May 7th.
15. **Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.
16. **Meeting Action Items:**
 - a. Jon will compile a list of topics and get an estimate for Town Forest ecological educational signs.
 - b. Tom and Jon will talk to the Tree Board about the timber harvest on March 15th.
 - c. Matt stated that he will discuss options for temporary parking on Reservoir Road during the timber harvest with the Department of Public Works.

- d. It was agreed to discuss the Town Forest Bird Habitat Assessment at the April 4th HCC meeting.
- e. Tom Kahl requested a hard copy of the Town Forest Bird Habitat Assessment.
- f. Matt agreed to continue to work with Town administration and the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association on the Memorandum of Understanding.
- g. Jon Bouton will coordinate the planning of the April Salamander event with Ben Lay of the Hartford Salamander Team
- h. Ted reported that he will be erecting a Kestrel nest box in a tree adjacent to a meadow on Kings Highway.
- i. Angie will assume lead monitoring of the vernal pool at the south end of the Hartford Town Forest, and Tom will assist if the HST doesn't provide a second monitor.
- j. Ted to talk with Ben of the HST about potential ecological event topics, speakers, and funding sources for the HST.
- k. The HCC agreed to partner with the Hartford Salamander Team on the April vernal pool walk, and Jon will coordinate this with Ben of the HST before the 4/4 HCC meeting.
- l. Matt agreed to discuss two of the properties with Tom and Katie regarding the next highest ranked natural resource parcels.
- m. It was agreed to see if there is room on the April 4th agenda for Karen Douville to talk about the Linking Lands Alliance maps.
- n. It was agreed to hold-off purchasing the boundary markers and awards plaque until the Trails Day event supplies have been obtained.