

Draft Minutes of the
Hartford Conservation Commission
June 6, 2022

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

Staff Present: Planner Matt Osborn.

Others Present: Karen Douville and Selectboard Liaison Mary Erdei.

A hybrid Hartford Conservation Commission (HCC) Meeting in compliance of the Open Meeting Law was held on Monday, June 6th in Room 2 of the Hartford Town Hall located at 171 Bridge Street, White River Junction. Chair Tom Kahl called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and proceeded to read the Hybrid Meeting Script followed by roll call.

1. **Changes to the Agenda:** Tom Kahl suggested adding the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions survey. The HCC agreed. He 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 May 2, 2022 HCC Meeting. There were no changes. Tom stated that the minutes are approved as written by unanimous consent.
3. **Linking Lands Alliance Maps:** Tom Kahl welcomed former Hartford Conservation Commission member Karen Douville to the meeting. Matt Osborn noted that Karen served on the HCC for 17 or 18 years and helped establish the Linking Lands Alliance (LLA), originally a ten-town group of Conservation Commissions that were interested in identifying and protecting wildlife corridors beyond individual town borders. After a few years, the LLA began to work with the Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife. Basically, the LLA was a pilot project for the entire state and the concept grew leading to statewide mapping of core forested areas that are critical for wildlife travel. The LLA developed a website which is current today. The LLA worked with the Two Rivers-Ottawquechee Regional Commission who developed maps for member towns.

Karen noted that mapping provides a 100-meter buffer around disturbed areas (buildings and non-Class 4 roads) and excludes agricultural land. She noted that maps include:

- Contiguous forests
- Landforms
- Ecologically important habitat

Karen noted that the mapping is available statewide with over 4,000 forest/wildlife blocks. She noted that one drawback about the statewide effort is that prioritization of core forest block at the state level loses some of the importance at the local level. She believes that all landowners can do something to improve wildlife habitat even if their forest block is not a priority block. Karen reported that the LLA received a Wellborn Ecology Grant to include use of the forest/habitat maps for educational purposes in public schools. Jon Bouton noted that this is an amazing project and thanked Karen for donating the maps and talking to the HCC.

4. **Climate Action Steering Team (CAST):** Lee Michaelides reported that CAST is setting up a knowledge base of what individual commissions are doing about implementing the recommendations in the Climate Action Plan. He noted that CAST has developed questions for each Commission. He stated that the most pivotal question relates to funding and the use of American Rescue Plan Act

(ARPA) funds. He noted that at this point, CAST is not sure about the ARPA criteria. Lee suggested brainstorming project ideas. He suggested asking for \$250,000 for the Town Conservation Reserve Fund which he believes dovetails with Climate Action Plan goals. He also suggested funds for invasive plant control. He asked for other ideas. Mary Erdei asked about funds to work with the Upper Valley Land Trust (UVLT). Lee agreed and noted that UVLT needs funds to assist landowners donating a conservation easement since there are legal costs as well as stewardship requirements to enforce the conservation easement. Matt Osborn noted that the Town Conservation Fund will pay up to \$5,000 to assist a property owner in donate a conservation easement. Mary Erdei noted that ARPA funds need to be under contract by 2024 and completed by 2026. Other ideas included:

- Invasive plant control
- Pollinator project
- Rebuild Wright's Reservoir
- Educational interpretive trail
- Conservation easement for the Town Forest
- Update the Town Forest Wildlife Habitat Assessment
- Update the Bird Habitat Assessment
- Trail Density Study
- Study the effect of recreational trails on wildlife
- Financial incentives for residents to grow trees

Lee suggested e-mailing Matt if they have other ideas.

- 5. Wetland Mapping:** Matt Osborn reported that the State is working on updating wetlands mapping. He noted that the current mapping is outdated and is neither accurate nor comprehensive. The new maps have revised wetland locations and added wetlands. Matt noted that comments for Phase I of the public comment period are due June 30th. He stated that this is an opportunity for the HCC to review the maps to see how it affects Hartford. Angie Emerson volunteered to look into it. Katie Mann suggested letting the public know about it by posting on the List Serv. The HCC agreed.
- 6. Town Forest Timber Harvest Information Walk:** Tom Kahl reported that there was a good turnout at the timber harvest information walk on May 5th. About thirty people attended. He noted that he has been posting responses to Laura Simon's questions about the timber harvest.
- 7. Town Forest Timber Harvest Update:** Tom Kahl reported that the timber harvest will be on the June 14th Selectboard agenda. He noted that A.J. Follensbee will be attending to answer questions. Tom is currently working on the powerpoint presentation.

Angie Emerson noted that she attended the May 31st meeting on climate change and forests at the Bugbee Senior Center. Biologist Bill Stubblefield noted that unmanaged forests capture more carbon. Mr. Stubblefield also said the Forest Management Plan for the Town Forest was exemplary. Angie expressed concern about the role that the Conservation Commission plays as stewards of Town land and the challenges with climate change. Tom stated that although there is a decrease in stored carbon of cut trees for 5-10 years, there is more carbon sequestration in managed forests in the long term. Tom added that large trees capture the most carbon and the timber harvest is cutting smaller trees. He stated that management is best for the long-term health of the forest. Lee Michaelides added that conducting small scale timber harvests in the Town Forest can show good forest management practices and increase public awareness of sustainable forestry. Jon Bouton noted that a fair amount of the cut trees will remain in the Town Forest and it will result in smaller holes in the tree canopy. He noted that although timber harvests are messy, there are many benefits. Mary Hutchins expressed concern

about increased fire danger if a lot of cut trees are left on-site. Jon responded that he doubts it will result in increased fire danger.

8. Other Town Forest Items:

- a. Memorandum of Understanding with the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association: Matt Osborn reported that we have an executed MOU with the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association. Mary Erdei requested a copy of it. Matt agreed to send out to the HCC.
- b. Trail Maps: Tom Kahl reported that Tim Schaal and the Boy Scouts continue to erect the new trail maps in various locations throughout the Town Forest. He offered to write a thank you note to them.
- c. Trails Workday: Tom Kahl reported that the annual Trails Workday occurred on June 4th and was well-attended. Approximately thirty people participated. Work included:
 - I. Simonds Way – constructed a bridge across a wet area.
 - II. West Side Loop trail relocation to bypass a wet area.
 - III. Erect signage on the Easy Way Up Trail that leaves the Town Forest.
 - IV. General trail maintenance.

Tom reported that Anna Schaal arranged for the UVMBA tool trailer to be at the event which was helpful.

Mary Hutchins reported that she heard from Town Forest neighbor David Brown who expressed concern about trails work occurring on his land east of the Town Forest. Mary stated that she responded that the Town would not authorize such work on private property without the landowners approval. Matt Osborn agreed and stated that David Brown called him as well.

- d. Town Forest Bird Walk: Tom Kahl reported that he attended the June 4th Bird Walk led by HCC member Ted Levin and Ornithologist Tom Sherry. Twenty-three people attended. Tom noted that Ted suggested doing more educational events. The HCC liked the idea.

9. Private Landowner Conservation Outreach: Matt Osborn reported that he will put together the information for the planned mailing to the next ten property owners.

10. Annual Hartford Community Coalition Block Party: Tom Kahl reported that the annual Block Party is scheduled for Wednesday, June 15th 5:00 – 8:00 p.m. He noted that the HCC regularly participates in the event and has a table with educational materials. Tom reported that he signed up for the event and asked for assistance staffing the booth. Angie and Katie volunteered.

11. Green-Up Day Results: Matt Osborn reported that the May 7th Green-Up Day was a successful event. Many volunteers went out before Green-Up Day and many businesses and organizations participated. He noted the following results:

- 456 Volunteers
- 3.24 tons collected.
- Approximately 85 miles of road cleaned
- 800 Green-Up bags used
- 35 tires collected.

Lee Michaelides volunteered to post the results on the Hartford List Serv.

12. Wetlands Question from Harvest Lane Resident: Matt reported that he had not heard from the VT DEC district wetlands specialist.

13. Announcements:

- a. Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions Survey: Tom Kale reported that the AVCC is asking Vermont Conservation Commissions to fill out a survey to understand their need. Tom agreed to forward the survey to the HCC.

14. Next Meeting: Tom Kahl reported that the next HCC meeting is scheduled for Monday, July 11th at 7:00 p.m.

15. Upcoming Events:

- a. Selectboard Discussion of the Timber Harvest: Tuesday, June 14th.
- b. Hartford Community Coalition Block Party, Wednesday, June 15th at 5:00 p.m.

16. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 9:09 p.m.

17. Meeting Action Items:

- a. Regarding additional items for ARPA funds, the HCC agreed to e-mail Matt Osborn.
- b. Angie volunteered to look to review the new wetlands map for Hartford. She also agreed to letting the public know about it by posting it on the List Serv.
- c. Matt agreed to distribute the executed Memorandum of Understanding with the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association.
- d. Tom agreed to write thank you notes to Tim Schaal and the Boy Scouts for installing new trail maps at locations in the Town Forest.
- e. Tom agreed to write thank you notes to Ornithologist Tom Sherry for leading the Bird Walk.
- f. Angie & Katie volunteered to set up the display and staff the booth for the Block Party
- g. Lee agreed to post the Green-Up Day results on the listserv.
- h. Tom agreed to forward the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions survey to the HCC.