

**Approved Minutes of the**  
Hartford Conservation Commission  
December 4, 2023

**Members Present:** Chris Beetham (8/7/27), Mary Hutchins (10/30/27), Ted Levin (11/15/25), Katie Mann (8/24/24) and chair Tom Kahl, (8/24/24).

**Staff Present:** Town Planner Matt Osborn.

**Others Present:** Selectboard Liaison Mary Erdei.

A hybrid Hartford Conservation Commission (HCC) Meeting in compliance of the Open Meeting Law was held on Monday, December 4th 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 7:05 p.m. and proceeded to read the Hybrid Meeting Script followed by roll call.

1. **Approval of Minutes:** Tom asked if there are any changes to the draft minutes of 11/6/23. There were none. Tom stated that the HCC minutes of 11/6/23 are approved as written by unanimous consent.
2. **Agenda:** Tom asked if there were any changes to the agenda. Matt Osborn suggested adding the amphibian trapping permit necessary for the annual vernal pool walk. Tom suggested adding Land Protection Grant and the Trails Inventory. The HCC agreed.
3. **Public Comments:** Tom asked if there are any public comments. There were none.
4. **Conservation Educational Events:** Tom reported that HCC member Sky Claud is working with Ben Fletcher of the Hartford Salamander Team (HST) on developing a program. Tom noted that Sky is very enthusiastic about starting a young family outdoor program. Katie Mann offered to help Sky with publicity. Ted Levin reported that he will lead a winter ecology walk in the Town Forest on Saturday, January 20<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 a.m. Ted also agreed to lead a spring bird walk in the Town Forest on Saturday, May 18<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 a.m.
5. **Environmental Stewardship Workshop:** Tom noted that the HCC agreed to hold an environmental stewardship workshop in February and invite other organizations to participate. Matt checked on available dates at the Bugbee Senior Center. The HCC reviewed the dates and decided on Thursday, February 29<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 p.m. Tom suggested that each organization speak for five minutes. Katie suggested contacting Junction Arts & Media (JAM) to see if they will record the event. Matt agreed to contact JAM. Tom agreed to prepare a write-up about the event to send to organizations.
6. **Great River Hydro (GRH) Wilder Dam Relicensing:** Matt presented a letter from the Connecticut River Conservancy (CRC) about the Wilder Dam licensing application going before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. The GRH application includes three dams in Vermont/New Hampshire Wilder, Bellows Fall and Vernon) as well as two facilities in Massachusetts. Since the permit will last for 30-50 years, the CRC is recommending that stakeholders use the permit process to “improve the health of the river”. The process has been going on since 2012. CRC is participating in the formal proceedings and is encouraging stakeholders including municipalities to comment to the FERC. Matt noted that Town Manager John Haverstock, Department of Planning and Development Director Lori Hirshfield, Parks and Recreation Department Director Scott Hausler and Matt met with CRC staff member Kathy Urffer on November 20<sup>th</sup> to hear about the application process. Kathy encouraged the Town to comment on the FERC application. A sixty-day comment period could begin in the coming months and Kathy Urffer suggested that the Town start working on it now. Matt noted

that this is the time for the HCC to comment as well. Matt noted that the CRC has collected information on the GRH application and has a webpage open to the public. Tom asked the HCC for their thoughts. Katie noted that the HCC supports strong ecological considerations and should comment on the application. The HCC agreed. Matt noted that staff will be working on developing comments which will go to the Selectboard for their consideration before being submitted to FERC. Tom suggested that the HCC visit the CRC webpage <https://www.ctriver.org/our-work/hydropower/> on the GRH relicensing.

7. **Kestrel Boxes:** Ted noted that he will contact Judy Barwood (Christian St) to follow up on Tom's initial call where she said that she is interested in installing a Kestrel box in an open meadow on her property. Mary will contact Corabel Amell (Jericho Road) about a Kestrel box on her land near Jericho St.
8. **Fiscal Year 2024/2025 HCC Budget:** Tom reported that he attended the 11/28 Selectboard budget session. He noted that there was debate about the conservation fund. Mary Erdei noted that there are certain factions that may be opposed to the conservation fund. Tom noted the importance of the Conservation Commission using their discretion in deciding which parcels to recommend the use of conservation funds. It must benefit the Town. The HCC agreed.
9. **HCC Webpage:** Matt reported that the Town IT Department will assist in the update of the HCC webpage. The next step for the HCC is to review the webpage and decide what changes the HCC would like to make. He suggested that the HCC form a subcommittee. Tom and Katie volunteered to work on it.
10. **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association (UVMBA):** Matt will pursue obtaining the required Certificate of Insurance from the UVMBA and presenting the MOU to the Hartford Town Manager.
11. **Trail Inventory/List of Potential Projects:** Chris noted that with the arrival of snow, we may have to wait until spring to undertake a survey of Town Forest trails. However, he noted that there is a warm front arriving this weekend that could melt the snow. Ted agreed to contact Chris if the snow melts enough to allow the trails inventory. Katie volunteered to post on the Hartford Town Forest Facebook page a note about staying off the trails if they are muddy.
12. **Town Forest Invasive Plants:** Katie suggested holding an invasive plant workday in the Town Forest on April 20<sup>th</sup> to treat honeysuckle and garlic mustard. The HCC agreed.
13. **Bliss Road Class 4 Section:** Matt reported that he will be conducting research on the Orrizonto Road conversion from a Class IV Road to a trail that occurred over twenty years ago.
14. **Route 5 Corridor Bike Survey:** The Town had recently received a questionnaire from VTRANS about a Route 5 bicycle corridor the length of the state to be answered by the Hartford Selectboard and Planning Commission. Matt reported that he met with Planning Commission chair John Reid and reviewed the survey. They discussed the recommendations in the Hartford Bicycle/Pedestrian Master Plan and John filled out the on-line survey. John was very supportive of the bike corridor concept. Mary Erdei reported that the Selectboard discussed the survey at a Selectboard meeting but did not make a decision. She noted that the project is in the early stages and will take many years to complete if it is funded.

- 15. Book “Nature’s Best Hope”:** Matt reported that the book by Ecologist/ Entomologist Doug Tallamy “Nature’s Best Hope Young Person’s Edition” has arrived at the Norwich Bookstore. He will pick the books up and deliver copies to the four Hartford libraries and four Hartford school libraries.
- 16. Announcements/Reports:**
- a. Pollinator Pathways: Tom noted that Sky is very interested in the project. Katie noted that she is working on the White River School gardens. She suggested reaching out to the Hartford and Quechee Garden Clubs. Tom reported that the Hartford Garden Club is interested in participating. It was agreed to continue discussion at next month’s meeting.
  - b. Annual HCC Report: Tom reported that the HCC Annual Report was completed and submitted to the Town Manager’s Office. Matt agreed to email the Report to the HCC.
  - c. Amphibian Trapping Permit: Matt reported that for many years, Jon Bouton has been submitting the required permit application to the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department necessary to trap amphibians for the annual vernal pool walk. He asked if someone else could take on that responsibility. Katie suggested inquiring with the Vermont Center for Ecostudies to see if they could do it since they have partnered with the HCC the past two years. Katie will inquire. Matt agreed to send Katie the permit form. Chris Beetham agreed to serve as a backup if VCE declines.
  - d. The Nature Conservancy TNC Land Protection Grant: Tom noted a 12/1/23 email from the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions that announced grants of up to \$50,000 for the permanent protection of resilient and connected land in priority landscapes. Tom will send out the AVCC announcement and the HCC agreed to discuss at the next meeting.
- 17. Upcoming Events:**
- a. **Winter ecology walk** in the Town Forest on Saturday, January 20<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 a.m
  - b. **Environmental Stewardship Workshop:** Thursday, February 29<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 p.m.
  - c. **Hartford Town Forest Invasive Plant Workday:** Saturday on April 20<sup>th</sup>
  - d. **Hartford Town Forest Salamander Meander:** Saturday April 27<sup>th</sup>
  - e. **Green Up Day:** Saturday May 4<sup>th</sup>
  - f. **Hartford Town Forest Bird Walk:** Saturday May 18<sup>th</sup>
- 18. Next HCC Meeting:** Tom noted that the next meeting is scheduled for Monday, 1/8 at 7:00 p.m.
- 19. Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 8:44 p.m.
- 20. Action Items:**
- a. Katie Mann offered to help Sky with publicity on the conservation education series.
  - b. Ted Levin will lead a winter ecology walk in the Town Forest on Saturday, January 20<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 a.m.
  - c. Ted will lead a spring bird walk in the Town Forest on Saturday, May 18<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 a.m.
  - d. The HCC selected Thursday, February 29<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 p.m. for the Environmental Stewardship Workshop.
  - e. Matt will contact JAM about recording the Environmental Stewardship Workshop.
  - f. Tom will prepare a write-up about the Environmental Stewardship Workshop to send to organizations.
  - g. Ted will contact Judy Barwood (Christian St) to confirm a location and details for installing a Kestrel box installed in an open meadow on her property.
  - h. Mary will contact landowners Corabel Amal (Jericho Road) to see if she is interested in a Kestrel box for her property.
  - i. Tom and Katie volunteered to work on review of the HCC webpage.

- j. Chris volunteered to lead a team of HCC and community members to develop a reconnaissance list of potential Hartford trail improvements for future grants.
- k. Matt will pursue getting the Memorandum of Understanding with the UVMBA signed by the Hartford Town Manager.
- l. Ted agreed to contact Chris if the snow melts enough to allow the trails inventory this month.
- m. Katie volunteered to post on the Hartford Town Forest Facebook page a note about staying off Town Forest trails if they are muddy.
- n. Tom will forward the Nature Conservancy Grant application information to the HCC.
- o. It was agreed to continue discussion on pollinator pathways at next month's meeting.
- p. Matt agreed to email the HCC Annual Report to the HCC.
- q. Katie will inquire if the Vermont Center for Ecostudies will take over responsibility for the amphibian trapping permit that is necessary to collect amphibians for the annual Town Forest vernal pool event.
- r. Matt agreed to send Katie the amphibian permit form.
- s. Chris Beetham agreed to serve as a backup if VCE isn't able to take over the permit form.
- t. Matt agreed to conduct research and discuss the potential changing of the Class IV Section of Bliss Road with the DPW Director, Fire Chief and Police Chief,
- u. Matt reported that he will pick up the books "Nature's Best Hope Young Person's Edition" and deliver copies to Town and school libraries.
- v. Tom will send out the AVCC announcement for Land Protection Grant Opportunities to the HCC

**21. HCC Member Terms:** Chris Beetham, (8/7/27) Sky Claud, (7/31/27) Mike Harris (8/7/27) Mary Hutchins, (10/30/27) Ted Levin (11/15/25) vice-chair Katie Mann (8/24/24). and chair Tom Kahl (8/24/24).