

Approved Minutes of the
Hartford Conservation Commission
March 4, 2024

Members Present: Chris Beetham (8/7/27), Mike Harris (8/7/27), Mary Hutchins (10/30/27), vice-chair Katie Mann (3/20/27) and chair Tom Kahl (8/24/24).

Staff Present: Town Planner Matt Osborn.

Others Present: Jon Bouton, Paul Gagnon and Lee Michaelides.

A hybrid Hartford Conservation Commission (HCC) Meeting in compliance of the Open Meeting Law was held on Monday, March 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 7:00 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 2/5/24. There were none. Tom stated that the HCC minutes of 2/5/24 are approved as written by unanimous consent.
2. **Public Comments:** Tom asked if there are any public comments. There were none.
3. **Environmental Stewardship Mix & Mingle:** Tom reported that he thought the event went very well and there was a good turnout. Katie agreed and said it was constructive. She suggested that volunteer groups provide their mission statement and not go into detail about their projects. Tom noted that Junction Arts and Media recorded the event. Once we get the link, he will share it with the HCC and groups that participated. Tom agreed to write thank you notes to JAM and the Bugbee Senior Center. Katie had already sent one to the Upper Valley Food Co-op. He thanked Mike Harris for presenting on behalf of the Conservation Commission. Katie said that Jason Hill suggested combining the event with First Friday.
4. **Conservation Educational Events:** Katie Mann reported that the Family Forest Frolic was pushed back to Saturday, March 16th from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Katie volunteered to put together a poster of all the spring HCC events. Tom thanked Katie.
5. **Great River Hydro (GRH) Relicensing:** Mike Harris, an environmental attorney, started by noting that the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) dam relicensing process is long and complicated. In addition, the licenses usually last between 20-50 years. Since FERC determined that the Great River Hydro (GRH) application is complete, a 60-day public comment period is open. Matt noted that the Town administration wants to make sure comments are submitted prior to the close of the 60-day period. As a result, it is recommended that the Commissions meet and discuss ideas the week of 3/18. Staff will then gather the comments and present to the Selectboard along with staff recommendations at the April 2nd Selectboard meeting. Tom requested that Matt find out how much land GRH owns in Hartford. Matt agreed. Katie noted that the portage around the Wilder Dam is in substandard condition. Mike asked if any of their land has a conservation easement on it and does Hartford receive any GRH funds beyond property taxes. Matt will inquire.

Matt asked if other HCC members are interested in joining Mike in a meeting with other commissions. Tom volunteered.
6. **Kestrel Boxes:** Tom reported that property owner Judy Barwood agreed to allow a kestrel box on her property on Christian Street. Matt agreed to contact the property owner on Costello Road about a kestrel box on their property. Katie suggested that the HCC coordinate with VINS. Tom noted that

after talking with Jim Armbruster of VINS we should have a monitoring program to help determine the effectiveness of the boxes. Tom will talk with Ted about a box monitoring program.

7. **HCC Website:** Matt reported that he met with Tom on the HCC webpage. Tom provided Matt with his recommended changes. Matt agreed with them. Matt stated that administrative assistant Danielle Taylor will make the changes in the coming weeks.
8. **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association (UVMBA):** Matt reported that he received the required Certificate of Insurance (COI) from the UVMBA. Matt will now present the MOU to Hartford Town Manager John Haverstock for signing.
9. **Trail Inventory/List of Potential Projects:** Chris Beetham reported that with spring arriving sooner this year, it will allow plenty of time for site visits to conduct a trail inventory. Tom noted that the Upper Valley Trails Alliance conducted a trail assessment in 2018 and most of the major deficiencies have been corrected. Matt agreed to send the HCC the UVTA Trails Assessment. Chris noted that the inventory will document costs which will be necessary for grant applications. It was agreed to hold a trails workday on Saturday, June 8th.
10. **Town Forest Invasive Plants:** Katie reported that the invasive plant workday in the Town Forest to treat honeysuckle and garlic mustard is scheduled for Saturday, April 20th. She suggested that the HCC routinely check hardpack brought into the Town Forest for invasive plants.
11. **Town Forest Interpretive Signs:** Tom reported that he installed eight interpretive signs throughout the timber harvest area.
12. **Amphibian Trapping Permit:** Chris reported that before the HCC meeting, he met with former HCC member Jon Bouton to assist Chris with the application for a state permit. With Jon's help, Chris will submit the application. The vernal pool walk is scheduled for Saturday, April 27th. Katie agreed to reach out to the Vermont Center for Ecostudies about leading the walk.
13. **Long-term Conservation:** Tom noted that in 2023, the State Legislature passed Act 59, the Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act (CRBPA). The goal of the Act is to conserve 30% of Vermont lands by 2030 and 50% by 2050. Conservation is defined as an area with permanent protection from conversion. Tom noted that there is a pinch point for wildlife crossing Route 4 for wildlife moving the Town Forest area to the Quechee Lakes Section 5. He asked if the HCC should contact property owners about conservation in the most important corridors. The HCC agreed. Matt agreed to identify property owners along the Route 4 corridor in Quechee. Mike, Chris, and Tom agreed to attend a Association of Vermont Conservation Commission Focus Group either in person on March 20th in Waitsfield VT or virtual on March 27th. Tom will send the Focus Group information to Mike and Chris.
14. **Bliss Road Class 4 Section:** Matt reported that he needs to meet with his boss, Planning and Development Director Lori Hirshfield before meeting with the DPW Director, Fire Chief and Police Chief to get their input on the possible conversion from a Class 4 road to a trail.
15. **HCC Award:** Matt reported that he will talk to Town Manager John Haverstock about it.
16. **Pollinator Pathways:** Katie reported that she will be purchasing seeds for the pollinator garden at the White River School. She noted that volunteers that work during school hours will have to undergo a background check and interested HCC members should let her know so she can get them the application.

17. Announcements/Reports:

- a. Tree Board Grant: Tom reported that the Tree Board received a \$10,000 grant for the Lyman Point riparian area.
- b. New Vermont Fur Bearing Rule: Mike reported that the new fur bearing rule is convoluted. He offered to do research on the topic if the HCC would like him to.

18. Upcoming Events:

- a. **Family Forest Frolic**: Sunday 3/16
- b. **Election of HCC Officers**: Monday, 4/1
- c. **Town Forest Invasive Plant Removal**: Saturday, 4/20. Subsequently changed to 4/13.
- d. **Hartford Town Forest Salamander Meander**: Saturday 4/27. Subsequently changed to 4/20.
- e. **Green Up Day**: Saturday 5/4.
- f. **Hartford Town Forest Bird Walk**: Saturday 5/18.
- g. **Trails Day**: Saturday 6/8

19. Next HCC Meeting: Tom noted that the next meeting is scheduled for Monday, 4/1 at 7:00 p.m.

20. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:44 p.m.

21. Action Items:

- a. Once the link to the Environmental Stewardship Mix & Mingle, Tom will share it with the HCC and groups that participated.
- b. Tom agreed to write thank you notes to JAM and the Bugbee Senior Center.
- c. Sky will lead the next young family outdoor education (Family Forest Frolic) event on Saturday, March 16th and Katie will make an event poster.
- d. Mike and Tom will meet with Town staff about the GRH FERC license application. Matt will research how much land GRH has in Hartford, if any have conservation easements, and does the Town receive any funding beyond property taxes.
- e. Matt will contact a property owner of a large parcel on Costello Road for the second kestrel box.
- f. Tom will talk with Ted about a monitoring program for the kestrel boxes we have installed.
- g. Planning and Development Department administrative assistant Danielle Taylor will make changes to the HCC webpage following website training.
- h. Matt will present the Memorandum of Understanding with the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association to Hartford Town Manager John Haverstock for signing.
- i. Matt agreed to send the HCC the UVTA Trails Assessment.
- j. Chris will submit the amphibian trapping permit application to the State for the vernal pool walk.
- k. Katie agreed to reach out to the Vermont Center for Ecostudies about leading the April salamander walk.
- l. Matt agreed to identify property owners along the Route 4 corridor in Quechee.
- m. Matt will be discussing the possible conversion of the Bliss Road Class 4 road to a trail with Planning & Development Director, DPW Director, Fire Chief and Police Chief to get their input.
- n. Matt agreed to discuss with Town Manager John Haverstock about the HCC Awards Program.
- o. Katie will order seeds for the White River School pollinator garden and HCC members should contact Katie for the application if they want to help with the garden during school hours.

22. 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 (3/20/27) and chair Tom Kahl (8/24/24).