

Approved Minutes of the
Hartford Conservation Commission
April 1, 2024

Members Present: 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).

Staff Present: Town Planner Matt Osborn.

Others Present: Selectboard Liaison Mary Erdei and resident Paul Gagnon.

A hybrid Hartford Conservation Commission (HCC) Meeting in compliance of the Open Meeting Law was held on Monday, April 1st 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 3/4/24. There were none. Tom stated that the HCC minutes of 3/4/24 are approved as written by unanimous consent.
2. **Public Comments:** Tom asked if there are any public comments. There were none.
3. **Changes to the Agenda:** Tom suggested adding the Town Forest Story Walk to the agenda. The HCC agreed. He asked if there are any other changes. There were none.
4. **Election of Officers:** Tom reported that the HCC annually elects a chair, vice-chair and treasurer. He noted that he has served as chair for five years and it is time to step down. The HCC thanked him for his service. It was acknowledged that Tom went above and beyond in his role as chair. There was discussion. Chris Beetham made a motion to appoint Katie Mann as chair, Mike Harris as vice-chair and Chris as treasurer. The motion was seconded by Ted Levin and approved 7-0.
5. **Conservation Educational Events:** Sky Claud reported that the 3/16 Family Forest Frolic at the Town Forest went well. Six families and about 20 in total participated. She noted that there seems to be a great deal of interest in the monthly program. The next monthly event will take place on Saturday, April 13th from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Katie suggested that with all of the HCC spring events, we should advertise them together. The HCC agreed. Katie volunteered to prepare a flyer.
6. **Wilder Dam- Great River Hydro (GRH) Relicensing:** Matt reported that a community discussion on the Dam relicensing Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) application was held on March 18th. Over twenty residents attended. River steward Kathy Urffer of the Connecticut River Conservancy led the discussion. The license is for a 40-year period. Comments on the application are due April 22nd. Town staff are going before the Hartford Selectboard tomorrow evening with a draft letter. Matt noted that he distributed the draft letter to the HCC on March 29th. Mike Harris noted that the GRH agreement with the Town was a bad deal for the Town. Tom added that the Town is seeking to be an intervener in the process which will enable the Town to appeal if FERC issues a decision unfavorable to the Town.
7. **Green-Up Day:** Matt Osborn reported that Green-Up Day is scheduled for Saturday, May 4th. He noted that people can pick up bags starting April 22nd at the Town Hall and Quechee Library. Matt noted that dumpsters will arrive at the Town Hall and Quechee Green on Wednesday, May 1st and be picked up Tuesday, May 7th. Matt agreed to work on Green-Up Day preparations and promotion. Tom noted the importance of HCC member participation in the event. Matt asked for assistance. Ted volunteered to help and on Thursday, May 2nd. Tom, Chris, Mike and Katie volunteered to help out on Green-Up Day.

8. **Kestrel Boxes:** Ted reported that a 4th kestrel box was installed on the Barlow property on Christian Street. Matt reported that he sent a letter to a property owner on Costello Road about a kestrel box on her property. He is waiting to hear back from her. Ted confirmed that kestrel use of the three installed boxes will be monitored. The first box installed in 2022 on the Jones' property on King's Highway near Reservoir Road has not yet been used by kestrels. As a result, Ted said that he will be relocating it to another location on this property. The second and third boxes were installed last year after mating season on the two properties of Sunrise Farms, and they will be monitored to see if they attract any kestrels this year.
9. **Follow-up from the Environmental Stewardship Mix & Mingle:** Tom reported that he heard back from several folks that they thought the event was enjoyable and it should be repeated every year or so. It was also suggested to tie in with the First Friday event downtown. The HCC agreed.
10. **HCC Website:** Matt reported that he met with administrative assistant Danielle Taylor who will make the changes to the HCC webpage in the coming weeks.
11. **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association (UVMBA):** Matt reported that the MOU was signed by Town Manager John Haverstock and executed last week. The MOU is good for three years.
12. **Trail Inventory/List of Potential Projects:** Chris reported that he has reserved the tool trailer from the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association for the Trail Day event on June 8th. He is working on scheduling times for site visits with other interested UVMBA and Mike and Tom this spring to inspect the trails. He noted that Matt provided him with a copy of the 2018 Trails Assessment. He plans on collaboratively developing a list of projects and prioritizing them.
13. **Town Forest Invasive Plants:** Katie reported that she will lead an invasive plant workday in the Town Forest on Saturday, April 27th from 9:00 a.m. to noon to treat honeysuckle and garlic mustard. Tom will bring the two HCC weed wrenches. Chris and Ted volunteered to help-out and Sky and Mary will check their schedules to see if they are available.
14. **Amphibian Trapping Permit:** Chris reported that the state permit for trapping amphibians for the vernal pool walk was approved. Chris and Jon Bouton will set the traps the day before the 4/20 vernal pool walk. The Hartford Salamander Team and the Vermont Center for Ecostudies will be partnering with the Conservation Commission.
15. **Long-term Conservation:** Mike suggested that we work with the Environmental Law Clinic at the Vermont Law and Graduate School on a toolbox on conservation easements. The HCC agreed. Mike will coordinate. Tom noted that he attended the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions on March 27th and that it makes sense to work with other towns and organizations on 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. 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. Matt and Tom will be meeting on 4/3 to identify important parcels to protect the wildlife crossing of the Route 4 corridor in Quechee.
16. **Bliss Road Class 4 Section:** Matt reported that he is meeting with the , Planning and Development Director Lori Hirshfield tomorrow on this issue. He will then discuss 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.
17. **HCC Award:** Matt reported that he will talk to Town Manager John Haverstock about it.

- 18. Forestry Workshops:** Tom reported that he was contacted by Barbara McIlroy of the Hanover Conservation Commission inviting the Hartford Conservation Commission to be a partner in a series of forestry workshops; the first “Declining Biodiversity in Upper Valley Forests on Thursday 4/18 at 6:00 p.m. at the Howe Library in Hanover. Ted stated that this is a good example of different groups working together on one landscape. The HCC agreed to be a partner in the series. Katie will add these events to the HCC Spring Events Calander and Tom will post them in the Hartford Listserv a few times before each individual event.
- 19. Hartford Community Coalition Annual Block Party:** Tom reported that the Annual Block Party is scheduled for Wednesday, June 19th at 5:00 p.m. He noted that the Conservation Commission volunteered to oversee the composting operation at last year’s Block Party and it went well. He suggested that we do it again. The HCC agreed. They also agreed to sign up for an educational booth at the event and Mike will follow up with the Community Coalition to confirm the HCC’s interest.
- 20. Pollinator Pathways:** Katie reported that she purchased seeds for the pollinator garden at the White River School. She stated that two workdays are planned for Sunday 5/5 at 2:00 p.m. and Sunday, 6/2 at 2:00 p.m. It was suggested that the garden should have educational signs.
- 21. Announcements/Reports:**
- a. Quechee Library Story Walk: Tom reported that for the third year in a row, the Quechee Library has requested permission to do a story walk in the Town Forest. The HCC agreed. Tom will contact Quechee Library Director Kate Schaal to confirm the HCC’s approval.
- 22. Upcoming HCC Events:**
- a. **Family Forest Frolic:** Sunday 4/13.
 - b. **Hartford Town Forest Salamander Meander:** Saturday 4/20.
 - c. **Town Forest Invasive Plant Removal:** Saturday, 4/27.
 - d. **Green Up Day:** Saturday 5/4.
 - e. **White River School Pollinator Garden Workday:** Sunday, 5/5.
 - f. **Family Forest Frolic:** Sunday 5/11.
 - g. **Hartford Town Forest Bird Walk:** Saturday 5/18.
 - h. **White River School Pollinator Garden Workday:** Sunday, 6/2.
 - i. **Trails Day:** Saturday 6/8.
- 23. Next HCC Meeting:** Tom noted that the next meeting is scheduled for Monday, 5/6 at 7:00 p.m.
- 24. Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 8:55 p.m.
- 25. Action Items:**
- a. Sky will lead the next young family outdoor education (Family Forest Frolic) event on Saturday, April 13.
 - b. Katie volunteered to prepare a flyer for all of the HCC spring events.
 - c. Matt agreed to work on Green-Up Day preparations and promotion.
 - d. Tom, Chris, Mike and Katie volunteered to help out on Green-Up Day.
 - e. Chris is working on scheduling times for site visits this spring to inspect the trails.
 - f. Chris plans to develop a list of projects and prioritize them.
 - g. Katie will lead invasive plant workday in the Town Forest on Saturday, April 27th.
 - h. Tom will provide Katie with the two HCC weed wrenches.
 - i. Chris and Ted volunteered to help-out with the invasive plant workday.

- j. Chris and Jon Bouton will set the traps the day before the 4/20 vernal pool walk.
- k. The Hartford Salamander Team and the Vermont Center for Ecostudies will be partnering with the Conservation Commission on the 4/20 vernal pool walk.
- l. Mike will coordinate with the Environmental Law Clinic at the Vermont Law and Graduate School regarding a conservation easement toolbox.
- m. Planning and Development Department administrative assistant Danielle Taylor will make changes to the HCC webpage following website training.
- n. Matt and Tom agreed to meet to identify property owners near the Quechee Route 4 wildlife corridor.
- o. 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.
- p. Matt agreed to discuss with Town Manager John Haverstock about the HCC Awards Program.
- q. The HCC agreed to help with composting at the Hartford Community Coalition Block Party and to have an educational booth at the event and Mike will confirm with the Coalition
- r. Katie will lead a planting of the White River School pollinator garden on 5/5 and 6/2.
- s. Tom will contact Quechee Library Director Kate Schaal to confirm the HCC's approval for a Story Walk in the Town Forest this summer.
- t. The HCC agreed to be a partner in the Forestry workshop series with the Hanover Conservation Commission and other groups and advertise these events.

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).