

Approved Minutes of the
Hartford Conservation Commission
October 7, 2024

- 1. Members Present:** Chris Beetham, (8/7/27), Sky Claud, (7/31/27), Mary Hutchins, (10/30/27), and chair Katie Mann (3/20/27).

Staff Present: Town Planner Matt Osborn.

Others Present: Holly Henderson, Erika Schneider of the Hartford Area Career & Technology Center, Selectboard Liaison Mary Erdei and Reena Garcia, Elizabeth Hine and Diana Csank of the Vermont Law and Graduate School.

A hybrid Hartford Conservation Commission (HCC) Meeting in compliance of the Open Meeting Law was held on Monday, October 7th in Room 2 of the Hartford Town Hall, 171 Bridge Street in White River Junction, Vermont. Katie Mann called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. and proceeded to read the Hybrid Meeting Script followed by roll call and introductions.

- 2. Approval of Minutes:** Katie asked if there are any changes to the draft minutes of 8/26/24. There were none. Katie stated that the minutes of 8/26/24 are approved as written by unanimous consent.
- 3. Public Comments:** Katie asked if there are any public comments. There were none.
- 4. Educational Partnerships:** Erika Schneider, Director of the Hartford Area Career & Technology Center (HAC&TC) was present to talk about opportunities for the Natural Resources Class to continue working with the Conservation Commission. Erika noted that HAC&TC has 13 programs. Given the lack of land at the school, the Natural Resources Class needs to partner with landowners for their training. Katie noted that working with schools is part of the HCC mission. Matt noted that that the Town Forest is 423 acres and the HCC has a small budget to manage the property. Working with HAC&TC is mutually beneficial. Erika noted that there is a new Natural Resources teacher. His name is Dan Gibson who comes to the school with strong credentials. Matt suggested inviting Dan to a future HCC meeting to discuss possible projects. The HCC agreed. Katie thanked Erika for coming to the meeting.
- 5. Long-term Conservation:** Reena Garcia, Elizabeth Hine and Diana Csank of the Vermont Law and Graduate School were present to discuss working with the HCC on a land conservation toolkit for landowners. They submitted a draft agreement with the Town. Matt noted that the agreement has to be reviewed by Town administration before it can be signed. Katie noted that there is conservation for climate resilience and conservation to protect natural resources. Diana Csank noted that the timeframe for the project is November and December and that they plan to provide case studies. Reena noted that they would like to know about past challenges and successes. Matt noted that the Conservation Commission has provided funding for conservation easements to property owners. Katie noted that the Conservation Commission hasn't had much success reaching out to property owners of parcels with important natural resources in Hartford. She stated that the Conservation Commission has utilized the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Biofinder. Katie thanked Reena, Elizabeth and Diana for attending. She looks forward to working with them.
- 6. Fiscal Year 2025/2026 HCC Budget:** Matt noted that each year, the Town goes through the budget process. The Conservation Commission budget comes under the Department of Planning and Development budget. Each department head develops a budget and presents it to the Town Manager. The Town Manager makes revisions and sends the budget to the Selectboard who hold budget sessions during the fall and finalize the budget to be presented to the Town voters to vote on in March. Matt noted that the fiscal year 2025/2026 budget runs from 7/1/25 to 6/30/26. He noted that most of the

Conservation Commission budget falls under the general fund which is restricted to the designated fiscal year. At the end of the fiscal year, unspent funds are returned to the general fund for the Selectboard to decide on how the funds are to be used. Matt presented expenditures from the 2023/2024 fiscal year. Matt noted that it is anticipated that this will be a tight budget year. Mary Erdei agreed. Matt noted that Green-Up Day costs went over budget for the first time this year. He noted the high cost of tire disposal. Chris suggested talking to White River Subaru to see if we could dispose of the tires through them to reduce the expense. Matt agreed to contact them.

<u>Category</u>	<u>2024/2025 Budget</u>	<u>2025/2026 Budget*</u>
Travel & Meetings	\$75	\$75
Advertising	\$100	\$100
Memberships	\$250	\$250
Materials and Supplies	\$605	\$605
Forestry	\$500	\$500
Contracted Serv. (Green-Up Day)	\$2,000	\$2,000
<u>Conservation Fund (Reserve Fund)</u>	<u>\$3,000</u>	<u>\$3,000</u>
Total	\$6,530	\$6,530

Mary Hutchins made a motion for level funding for the fiscal year 2025/2026 conservation budget. The motion was seconded by Chris and approved unanimously.

7. **David Chang Conservation Area (DCCA):** Matt reported that he contacted Dana Hazen of Redstart about the cost to treat the invasive plants at the DCCA (purple loosestrife, Oriental bittersweet and black swallowwort). Dana offered to donate his time and only charge for the cost of the herbicides. This would amount to considerable cost savings to the HCC and Town.

Matt noted that several folks recommended planting trees along the riverbank to help shade the river. It was agreed to look at opportunities to obtain trees and plant them in the spring. Erika Schneider commented that that might be something that the Natural Resources Class at HAC&TC could do. Matt will seek approval from Town administration regarding the Redstart offer.

8. **Pollinator Gardens:** Katie reported that the pollinator garden at the White River School replaced day lilies with native plants. Matt reported that Resilient Hartford is planting a pollinator garden at the Clifford Park Food Forest. Katie noted that pollinator gardens have generated a lot of interest and momentum.
9. **Source to the Sea Cleanup:** Chris reported that Matt, Katie and her family and a couple participated in the September 8th Source to the Sea Cleanup. The effort focused on Watson Park, Clifford Park and the West Hartford Bridge. The trash was taken to Royalton and disposed of by the White River Partnership.
10. **9/11 Forestry Walk:** Katie reported that a forestry walk with the Selectboard, County Forester A.J. Follensbee, Matt and herself took place on September 11th. Three Selectboard members attended. Katie thought that it went well.
11. **Tree Tubes:** Katie reported that A.J. Follensbee recommends obtaining tree tubes to protect seedlings in the Town Forest harvested area from deer browse. The HCC agreed. Katie volunteered to contact the White River Partnership to inquire about the cost and the best place to purchase them.

- 12. Forest Family Frolic:** Sky reported that the event that is geared to young families is going well. They meet at the Town Forest the second Saturday of the month from 10:00-11:00 a.m. The next event is Saturday, October 12th. Holly Henderson suggested making a flyer for upcoming months and the topic. Others agreed.
- 13. Game of Logging Class:** Katie reported that the annual chainsaw training for the Hartford Area Career & Technology Center takes place in the fall. County Forester A.J. Follensbee agreed to select the trees to be cut for the class. The chosen trees will help implement the Forest Management Plan. Mary Hutchins made a motion to allow the training. The motion was seconded by Chris and approved unanimously. Matt noted that the Town requires a Certificate of Insurance which Erika Schneider agreed to submit to the Town.
- 14. A.J. Follensbee Transferring to Northern Orange County and Southern Caledonia County:** Matt reported that A.J. has done a lot of work for the Town and Conservation Commission including updating the Forest Management Plan, overseeing the timber harvest and holding workshops on forest management. He suggested chipping in and obtaining a gift card for A.J. as a token of appreciation for all that he has done for us. The HCC agreed. Donations can be given to Matt and he will obtain the gift card.
- 15. HCC Awards:** Matt suggested the HCC form a subcommittee for the award program and present a recommendation to the HCC after reviewing the nominations. The HCC agreed. Mary Hutchins and Sky volunteered to serve on the subcommittee. Matt will revise the memo to the Town Manager.
- 16. HCC Website:** There was discussion about reorganizing the webpage. Chris suggested listing HCC events. Matt suggested posting about the Vermont Law and Graduate School Conservation Toolkit Project. Chris and Katie agreed to meet to discuss changes to the HCC webpage. Katie stated that she would like to get input from other HCC members as well.
- 17. HCC Bylaws:** Matt reported that he made revisions to the 1993 HCC Bylaws and emailed them to the HCC. Matt suggested creating a subcommittee. Katie suggested that Mike and her work with Matt on it and present the proposed revisions to the HCC at a future meeting.
- 18. Announcements/Reports:**
- a. AVCC Conference: Katie reported that she attended the annual conference of the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions “Sowing Seeds for a Resilient Future” in Randolph Center. She noted that the sessions were excellent. Katie said that there was a very good session on reaching those who we normally don’t hear from. She also noted that if we establish a conservation easement on the Town Forest, it would apply to the goal of 30% of state land protected by 2030 and 50% by 2050. She also enjoyed a session on the impact of recreation can have on the land. Katie stated that it was a great networking opportunity and recommended that other HCC attend in the future.
 - b. Linda Wilson Estate: Matt reported that former Conservation Commission member and chair Linda Wilson left funds of her estate to the Town conservation fund. Matt was contacted by an attorney and is waiting for final disbursement. Matt noted that Linda was an amazing person.
 - c. Hartford Salamander Team: Katie reported that she received a proposal from Ben Fletcher of the Hartford Salamander Team about working with the HCC on educational programs. Katie will forward it to the HCC.

- d. HCC Opening: Matt noted that Holly Henderson submitted an application to serve on the HCC. She will interview with the Selectboard on Tuesday, 10/15.

19. Upcoming HCC Events:

- a. Family Forest Frolic: Saturday 9/14, 10:00 a.m.
b. Hartford Community Coalition Block Party: Friday, 10/18 at 3:30. Katie stated that she needs help to set up and staff a table for the event.

20. Next HCC Meeting: Katie noted that the next meeting is scheduled for Monday, 11/4 at 7:00 p.m.

21. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

22. Action Items:

- a. It was agreed to continue discussion about the educational partnership with the Hartford Area Career & Technology Center.
b. Matt will work with the Town administration regarding the agreement to work with the Vermont Law and Graduate School to prepare a land conservation toolbox.
c. Matt will work with Town administration to seek approval to work with Redstart to treat invasive plants at the David Chang Conservation Area.
d. Sky will lead the next young family outdoor education (Family Forest Frolic) event on Saturday, October 12th.
e. Matt will request a Certificate of Insurance for the Game of Logging and other projects in the Town Forest.
f. Mary Hutchins and Sky volunteered to serve on the HCC Award subcommittee.
g. Donations for A.J. Follensbee can be given to Matt and he will obtain the gift card.
h. Chris and Katie agreed to meet to discuss changes to the HCC webpage.
i. Matt agreed to revise the memo to Town Manager John Haverstock about the HCC Awards Program for discussion with the Selectboard chair and vice-chair.
j. The HCC agreed to have a booth at the 10/18 Hartford Community Coalition Block Party.
k. Katie, Mike and Matt will meet to review the HCC Bylaws and then discuss with the HCC at a future meeting.

23. HCC Member Terms: Chris Beetham (8/7/27), Sky Claud, (7/31/27), vice-chair Mike Harris (8/7/27), Mary Hutchins, (10/30/27), Ted Levin, (11/15/25) and chair Katie Mann (3/20/27).