

Approved Minutes of the
Hartford Conservation Commission
December 2, 2024

- 1. Members Present:** Chris Beetham, (8/7/27), Holly Henderson (10/14/28), Ted Levin, (11/15/25) and chair Katie Mann (3/20/27).

Staff Present: Town Planner Matt Osborn.

Others Present: Dan Gibson, Hartford Area Career & Technology Center and Mary Erdei, Selectboard Liaison.

A hybrid Hartford Conservation Commission (HCC) Meeting in compliance of the Open Meeting Law was held on Monday, December 2nd 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.

- 2. Approval of Minutes:** Katie asked if there were any changes to the draft minutes of 11/4/24. There were none. Katie stated that the minutes of 11/4/24 are approved as written by unanimous consent.
- 3. Public Comments:** Katie asked if there were any public comments. There were none.
- 4. Educational Partnerships:** Hartford Area Career & Technology Center (HAC&TC) Natural Resources teacher Dan Gibson was present to talk about educational opportunities working with HAC&TC. Katie welcomed Dan. He noted that he started at the position in the fall. His background is in tree care, landscaping and stonework. He has worked with former Natural Resources Teacher Tom Ostler. Dan is currently working on developing a curriculum for the Natural Resources class. Dan expressed an interest in working with the HCC to do projects in the Town Forest. Katie noted that the HCC worked with County Forester A.J. Follensbee on the update of the Forest Management Plan 2019/2020 and the timber harvest of 2022/2023. She stated that A.J. has moved to a different post in northern Orange County and southern Caledonia County. A new County Forester will begin in early 2025. Matt noted that the protocol to do work in the Town Forest is for the Natural Resources teacher to work with the County Forester and ensure that the work is in conformance with the adopted Forest Management Plan. Any cutting will require the approval of the HCC.

Katie noted that last year, the Natural Resources class cut beech in the Town Forest to diversify the understory. She added that the HCC is planning to use tree tubes to protect seedlings.

Dan noted that he is working with the Hartford Parks and Recreation Department to provide cuttings for the Polar Express event. He asked if the HAC&TC could cut some young pine in the former Lower Hurricane Reservoir. Ted responded that the thick white pine provides ideal habitat for snowshoe hare. It was agreed to leave the white pine alone. Dan said he will find another site.

Dan noted that for the Game of Logging training, the Natural Resources Class cut some marked hemlock. He asked if the Natural Resources Class could haul the trees out of the forest using low impact logging practices for them to process. Matt suggested that the HCC visit the site individually and then discuss at the January 6th meeting. The HCC agreed. Holly volunteered to meet with Dan at the Town Forest and take photos.

- 5. Tree Tubes:** Katie reported that we received 29 tree tubes and reusable zip ties from the Black River Action Team. In addition, Mike Harris picked up additional tree tubes donated from the Nature Conservancy. Katie noted that County Forester A.J. Follensbee recommended obtaining 50 tree tubes

to protect seedlings in the Town Forest harvested area from deer browse. Katie noted that to install the tree tubes, the ground can't be frozen. Katie stated that we will need to obtain 4' bamboo stakes.

6. **Forest Family Frolic:** Katie reported that the next event is scheduled for Saturday, December 14th at 10:00 a.m.
7. **Safety Vests:** Katie reported that three more vests that were donated by the Vermont Center for Ecostudies were delivered to the Town Forest. Matt reported that he has been posting notices regularly on the Hartford List Serv about safety during hunting season.
8. **Maanawaka Conservation Area Update:** Matt reported that he contacted former HCC members Jon Bouton and Tom Kahl about the leaner near the southern end of the Hazen Trail. Tom and Jon did a site visit and concluded that it should be taken down and took care of it. Matt also noted that he posted on the Hartford List Serv about seeking a volunteer to maintain the Hazen and Backwater trails. A parent of a boy scout responded that they were interested in taking care of the trail. Matt will follow-up.
9. **David Chang Conservation Area (DCCA):** Matt reported that he reached out to Dartmouth Professor and Aquatic Biologist Celia Chen. Celia agreed to visit the site and give us her opinion about the bank erosion. Matt will follow-up.
10. **HCC Budget:** Matt reported that Planning and Development Department Director Lori Hirshfield presented her budget to the Selectboard last week. It went well. Mary Erdei said that the only question that came up about the HCC budget was whether the Green-Up Day budget should be increased based on the 2024 Green-Up Day expenses. There were no questions or comments about the conservation fund. Mary noted that it is a very tight budget year and the Selectboard are looking at ways to cut the budget.
11. **HCC Awards:** Matt reported that he sent Mary Hutchins and Sky the approved memo on the HCC Award Program. Mary and Sky will meet to discuss and make a recommendations at a future meeting.
12. **HCC Website:** Katie reported that Chris and Katie are working on changes to the HCC webpage. They started with suggestions that former Chair Tom Kahl made. They suggest keeping both the Conservation Commission webpage and the conservation web page under the Planning and Development Department. The HCC webpage would focus on the HCC, Town Forest and plans/inventories. The conservation webpage would focus on conservation resources. Once finished with their recommendations, Katie and Chris will present the recommendations to the HCC for approval.
13. **HCC Bylaws:** Katie reported that she made revisions to the HCC Bylaws and passed it on to Mike. Mike will review the bylaws and meet with Katie and Matt before presenting recommendations to the HCC.
14. **Long-term Conservation:** Matt reported that Town Manager John Haverstock reviewed the contract and has no concerns. Matt reported that Mike will contact the Vermont Law and Graduate School to see about starting the project during the spring semester.
15. **Announcements/Reports:**
16. **Upcoming HCC Events:**
 - a. Family Forest Frolic: Saturday 12/14 at 10:00 a.m.
 - b. Annual Winter Natural History Walk: Saturday, 1/25 at 8:00 a.m.

- c. Conservation Mix & Mingle: Friday, 3/7.
- d. Vernal Pool Walk: A Saturday in April.
- e. Spring Wildflower Walk: A Saturday in April.
- f. Green-Up Day: Saturday, 5/3.
- g. Migratory Bird Walk: Saturday, 5/17.
- h. Trails Day: Saturday, 6/7.

17. Next HCC Meeting: Katie noted that the next meeting is scheduled for Monday, 1/6 at 7:00 p.m.

18. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:22 p.m.

19. Action Items:

- a. The HCC agreed to visit the Town Forest individually to look at the downed hemlock trees and then discuss at the January 6th HCC meeting about allowing the Natural Resources Class to haul the trees off-site.
- b. Holly volunteered to meet with Dan at the Town Forest and take photos of the downed trees that HAC&TC would like to haul off site.
- c. The HCC will need to obtain 4' bamboo stakes.
- d. Matt will follow-up with a potential volunteer about maintaining the southern half of the Hazen Trail and the Backwater Trail.
- e. Matt will arrange a site visit with Aquatic Biologist Celia Chen to look at the bank erosion at the David Chang Conservation Area.
- f. Sky will lead the next young family outdoor education (Family Forest Frolic) event on Saturday, December 14th.
- g. Sky and Mary will provide a report at a future HCC meeting about the HCC Awards Program.
- h. Once finished with their recommendations on website changes, Katie and Chris will present the recommendations to the HCC for approval.
- i. Katie, Mike and Matt will work on the revisions to the HCC Bylaws and complete a draft by February to present to the HCC.
- j. Mike will contact the Vermont Law and Graduate School to see if they can work on the conservation toolkit during the spring semester.

20. HCC Member Terms: Chris Beetham (8/7/27), Sky Claud, (7/31/27), Mike Harris, vice-chair (8/7/27), Holly Henderson, (10/14/28), Mary Hutchins, (10/30/27), Ted Levin, (11/15/25) and Katie Mann, chair (3/20/27).