

Approved Minutes of the
Hartford Conservation Commission
December 1, 2025

Members Present: Sky Claud, James Donahey, Holly Henderson, Mary Hutchins, Ted Levin and chair Katie Mann.

Staff Present: Town Planner Matt Osborn.

Others Present: Selectboard Liaison Erik Krauss.

A hybrid Hartford Conservation Commission (HCC) Meeting in compliance with the Vermont Open Meeting Law was held on Monday, December 1st in Room 2 of the Hartford Town Hall, 171 Bridge Street in White River Junction, Vermont. Chair Katie Mann called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Katie proceeded to read the Hybrid Meeting Script followed by a roll call.

1. **Approval of the Minutes of 11/3/25:** Katie asked if there were any changes to the draft minutes of 11/3/25. James noted a correction. Mary made a motion to approve the minutes of 11/3 with the noted correction. It was seconded by Ted and unanimously approved.
2. **Public Comments:** Katie asked if there were any public comments. There were none.
3. **Town Forest Kiosk Trees:** Katie reported that she took a look at the trees behind the kiosk and stated that there is a high density of trees of which some are dead. Matt had expressed concern that a fallen tree could damage the kiosk. James volunteered to take a look and determine if any trees pose a threat to the kiosk.
4. **Chestnut Tree Planting:** James reported that he scouted areas in the Town Forest where chestnut trees could be planted and he believes that there is space for 12 chestnut trees. Holly stated that she will coordinate with Daniel Jones of the American Chestnut Foundation and loop back with Dan Gibson of the Hartford Area Career & Technology Center regarding the planting.
5. **Family Forest Frolic:** Sky reported that the next Family Forest Frolic will take place on Saturday, January 10th at 10:00 a.m. in the Town Forest. Sky will post on the Hartford Listserv. Katie and Sky volunteered to work on a poster for the event.
6. **Town Forest Wildlife Habitat Assessment:** Katie reported that if the HCC would like to contract with the UVM Field Naturalist Program to assist with the Wildlife Habitat Assessment (WHA), there is a fee of \$6,500 for their services. The annual application deadline is December 1st. Katie noted that she will contact the UVM Program Coordinator to see if it would be a good fit for UVM to take on the WHA and whether to consider a proposal for next December. Ted thinks it's a great idea to pursue. The HCC agreed. Katie suggested if we move forward with a proposal next year, we should have a draft done by September. She noted that she would need assistance if we took the project on. The HCC agreed. Katie asked about the funds for the Wildlife Habitat Assessment. Matt responded that the last Wildlife Habitat Assessment was paid for by the Town Conservation Fund. To access the Conservation Fund, the HCC submits a request to the Selectboard. Holly noted that UNH has a wildlife biology program and it might be worthwhile contacting them.
7. **Maanawaka Conservation Area Encampment Clean-up:** Katie reported that Sky, James and she participated in the homeless encampment clean-up on Sunday, 11/9. She noted that they dismantled two structures and returned the areas to as much as possible to their natural condition. Matt reported that he spoke to the Town Health Officer Brett Mayfield about the items assembled by the road. Brett

indicated that he has been in touch with the owner of the items and that if they are not moved, the Town will dispose of them.

8. **Maanawaka Conservation Area Posting Sign Backings:** James reported that one large sheet of pressure treated plywood will make 24 sign backings. Matt noted that the Town has an account at Foggs Hardware. James agreed to price it out. Once that happens, Matt will make arrangements to obtain the plywood. James said he would cut the sign backings for installation next fall.
9. **Maanawaka Graffiti:** Katie reported that there are trail signs and trees that were sprayed with graffiti in the Maanawaka Conservation Area. She suggested that in the spring, the HCC repaint the trail signs and obtain brown spray paint to cover up the red spray paint on trees. The HCC agreed.
10. **Maanawaka Sign:** Matt reported that he will inquire about using the existing address signpost on Route 5 for a sign directing people to the Maanawaka Conservation Area.
11. **Maanawaka Conservation Area Management Plan:** Katie reported that she would like to use the same format on the Maanawaka Conservation Area Management Plan as the Town Forest Management Plan. The HCC agreed.
12. **HCC Budget:** Katie reported that she attended the Selectboard Budget Session where the Planning and Development Department's budget which includes the HCC Budget was presented. The Selectboard did not have any comments or questions regarding the HCC budget.
13. **Vermont Wetland Rules:** Katie reported that Governor Scott's Executive Order 0625 proposes reducing wetlands buffers for housing projects with access to municipal sewer and it has received a great deal of opposition from the environmental community. Two public hearings on the rule change are scheduled for next week and public comments are due on January 14th. Katie noted that for Class II wetlands, the buffer would be reduced from 50' to 25'. She also stated that Hartford would be among the most impacted communities in Vermont given the amount of land served by Town sewer that includes Quechee as well as White River Junction, Wilder and Hartford Village. She asked the HCC if they would like to write a letter in response to the rule change. The HCC agreed that a letter should be submitted. Holly and Sky volunteered to work on the letter. Katie agreed to send the HCC a link to the mark-up of the Wetland Rule changes and the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions Listserv comments about the rule changes to the HCC. Erik suggested sending comments to one HCC member. Sky volunteered and requested comments by December 15th. It was agreed to review and discuss the letter at the January 5th meeting.
14. **Byron Hill Conserved Property:** Matt reported that a 95-acre parcel on Byron Hill Road has been conserved. The land was donated to the Vermont Land Trust by Mark and Kym Williams in 2021 to protect the property. The Land Trust then sold it to Sylvie and Daniel Horning who placed a conservation easement on the property. Katie asked if the Town has a list of all the conserved properties in Town. Matt is not aware of a detailed list of conserved parcels in Hartford but he will investigate.
15. **Bliss Road Property:** Katie reported that she met with a property owner on Bliss Road who is considering a conservation easement on their property if a number of conditions are met. The parcel is located in close proximity to the Town Forest and has a large wetland. Katie agreed to contact the Upper Valley Land Trust to discuss options. Katie noted that one of the downsides about a conservation easement on this property is that the Town Forest doesn't have a conservation easement. It was noted that the HCC has considered a conservation easement for the Town Forest in the past. The HCC agreed to discuss the possibility of a conservation easement for the Town Forest.

- 16. David Chang Conservation Area:** Katie reported that in addition to the Town Forest and the Maanawaka Conservation Area, the Conservation Commission is responsible for managing a third property, the David Chang Conservation Area. The 6.5-acre parcel is located on the Hartford/Hartland town line on the south side of the Ottauquechee River and abuts Route 4. The Town obtained the property from Vermont Institute of Natural Science (VINS) following the 2008 recession. Katie noted that the property has rare plants as well as invasive plants. The invasive plants were treated by herbicides a few years ago. Additional treatment is planned for 2026. Katie noted that there is an erosion problem along the bend of the Ottauquechee River. Trout Unlimited recommended planting shade trees along the riverbank. In addition, Dartmouth Professor and Aquatic Ecologist Celia Chen is scheduled to visit the site in the spring to give us her opinion. Katie suggested holding an HCC site visit in the spring. The HCC agreed.
- 17. Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions Annual Tiny Grant Application:** Matt reported that the annual grant application is due April 11th. He suggested thinking about a project now so that we have ample time to discuss and prepare an application. The HCC agreed. Holly suggested obtaining trail cameras for monitoring wildlife in the Town Forest. Ted cautioned that it is time consuming to download the photos daily. It was agreed to continue discussion at the next meeting.
- 18. Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association Monthly Meeting:** James reported that he attended the UVMBA October monthly meeting. He stated that he will get a debriefing from former HCC & UVMBA member Chris Beetham. Following that, James will connect with UVMBA about planning the annual Trails Day event at the Town Forest.
- 19. Upcoming HCC Events:**
- Family Forest Frolic on Saturday, January 10th at 10:00 a.m. in the Town Forest to be led by Sky.
 - Town Forest Natural History Walk: Ted will lead the winter Natural History Walk on Saturday, January 17th at 7:00 a.m.
 - Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association (UVMBA) Annual Meeting: James reported that the annual meeting of the UVMBA is scheduled for on Wednesday, January 28th.
- 20. Announcements/Reports:** There were no announcements.
- 21. Community Events:** Katie announced that she posted new links.
- AVCC : <https://vtconservation.com/fall-webinars-from-the-community-wildlife-program/>
 - Vermont Woodlands Association: <https://vermontwoodlands.org/upcoming-events>
 - Vermont Coverts; Woodlands for Wildlife: <https://vtcoverts.org/calendar.html>
 - Upper Valley Land Trust: <https://uvlt.org/events/list/Adjournment>
- 22. Next HCC Meeting:** Katie noted that the next meeting is scheduled for Monday, 1/5 at 7:00 p.m. She suggested putting the Conservation Stewardship Mix & Mingle on the agenda. The HCC agreed.
- 23. Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 8:55 p.m.
- 24. Action Items:**
- James volunteered to take a look and determine if any trees pose a threat to the Town Forest kiosk.
 - Holly stated that she will coordinate with Daniel Jones of the American Chestnut Foundation and loop back with Dan Gibson of the Hartford Area Career & Technology Center regarding the planting of chestnut trees in the Town Forest.

- c. Sky reported that the next Family Forest Frolic will take place on Saturday, January 15th at 10:00 a.m. in the Town Forest. Sky will post on the Hartford Listserv. Katie and Sky volunteered to work on a poster for the event.
- d. Katie noted that she will contact the UVM Program Coordinator to see if it would be a good fit for UVM to take on the WHA and whether to consider a proposal for next December.
- e. James agreed to price it out the pressure treated plywood for the Maanawaka Conservation Area sign backings. Once that happens, Matt will make arrangements to obtain the plywood.
- f. James said he would cut the sign backings for installation at the Maanawaka Conservation Area next fall.
- g. To address the graffiti at the Maanawaka Conservation Area, next spring, the HCC agreed to repaint the trail signs and obtain brown spray paint to cover up the red spray paint on trees.
- h. Matt reported that he will inquire about using the existing address signpost on Route 5 for a sign informing the public of the Maanawaka Conservation Area.
- i. Holly and Sky volunteered to work on the letter regarding the proposed change in wetland rules.
- j. Katie agreed to send the HCC a link to the mark-up of the Wetland Rules Executive Order and the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions Listserv comments on the Wetland Rules to the HCC.
- k. Sky volunteered to receive HCC comments on the Wetlands Rules and requested comments by December 15th.
- l. It was agreed to review and discuss the Wetlands Rules letter at the January 5th meeting.
- m. Matt is not aware of a detailed list of conserved parcels in Hartford but he will investigate.
- n. Katie agreed to contact the Upper Valley Land Trust to discuss conservation easement options.
- o. The HCC agreed to discuss the possibility of a conservation easement for the Town Forest.
- p. The HCC agreed to hold a site visit at the David Chang Conservation Area in the spring.
- q. It was agreed to continue discussion of the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions spring grant at the next meeting.
- r. James will get a debriefing from former HCC & UVMBA member Chris Beetham about the UVMBA.
- s. James will connect with Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association about planning the annual Trails Day event at the Town Forest.

25. HCC Member Terms: Sky Claud, (7/31/27), James Donahey, (7/13/29), Mike Harris, vice-chair (8/7/27), Holly Henderson, (10/14/28), Mary Hutchins, (10/30/27), Ted Levin, (10/27/29) and Katie Mann, chair (3/20/27).