

Draft Minutes of the
Hartford Conservation Commission
July 21, 2026

Members Present: James Donahey, Mary Hutchins, Ted Levin and chair Katie Mann.

Staff Present: Town Planner Matt Osborn.

Others Present: Green Mountain Power Operations Supervisor Kevin Matte and Tad Montgomery.

A hybrid Hartford Conservation Commission (HCC) Meeting in compliance with the Vermont Open Meeting Law was held on Monday, June 1st in Room 312 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., read the hybrid meeting script followed by roll call.

1. **Approval of the Minutes of 6/1/26:** Katie asked if there were any changes to the draft minutes of 6/1/26. There were no changes. Mary made a motion to approve the minutes of 6/1/26 as written. The motion was seconded by Ted and unanimously approved.
2. **Public Comments:** Katie asked if there were any public comments. There were none.
3. **Power Pole Work in the Maanawaka Conservation Area:** Green Mountain Power Operations Supervisor Kevin Matte was present to talk about the utility pole replacement in the power line right-of-way that runs through the Maanawaka Conservation Area in Wilder. The work will be done this fall (late September/early October) and will involve replacing pole #3 at the top of the hill. The work will require creating a roadway traversing the hillside and two-level pads for equipment. No material will need to be brought to the site. The work will take 3-4 total days. Kevin noted that the Hazen Trail passes through work area. The HCC suggested closing the trail during construction. Kevin stated that GMP will install snow fencing around the construction zone. Construction of the roadway will take place when it is dry. They will seed and mulch before and after the pole replacement. They typically use a conservation mix with rye but GMP is open to suggestions. Kevin estimated that the disturbed area will be approximately 10,000 square feet. Katie suggested using a native seed mix and will send Kevin the seed variety. Katie suggested signage before and during construction and that GMP coordinate with the Montshire Museum and neighbor Henry Hazen. Kevin agreed. James asked if GMP washes equipment before moving to a new site. Kevin responded no but that they will do that before arriving at the Maanawaka Conservation Area. Kevin will inform the Town before work is being done. Matt will work with the Town Communications and Media Specialist to get the word out to the public about the work and trail closure. James asked whether the herbicides used in the power line right-of-way is for tree control or to keep out invasive plants? Kevin responded that he doesn't know but will inquire with that company division. Katie thanked Kevin for coming to the meeting and working with the Conservation Commission.
4. **Hazen Trail Sign:** Matt reported that he met with representatives from VELCO about the Town's request to post a wayfinding sign on Route 5 to inform the public about the trail location. VELCO expressed concern about increased visitors and vehicles parked along the access drive to their substation. VELCO is concerned that parked vehicles could prevent access to the substation. In addition, Matt learned about the 2027 plans to do major improvements to the substation and the need to close the trailhead parking during construction. The consensus of the VELCO meeting was to discuss the trailhead sign after the 2027 construction. The HCC agreed.
5. **Maanawaka Conservation Area Management Plan:** James reported that he is plugging away on the update and will continue to work on it.

- 6. Rights of Nature Ordinance:** Katie expressed concern about the capacity of the HCC to deal with the proposed Ordinance. James agreed, stating that he doesn't think the HCC has the bandwidth to take this on. He also expressed concern about the 60-day timeline which would be difficult to meet. Matt expressed concern about the Town and the proposed subcommittee of the Conservation Commission having the qualifications necessary to enforce the proposed ordinance. Matt noted that the current practice if the Town receives a water quality complaint, they contact the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation which he stated has the qualified personnel to determine a violation and pursue enforcement. There was discussion. Mary made a motion that the HCC does not have the capacity or the necessary expertise to take on enforcement of the ordinance and as such doesn't accept the proposed Ordinance as presented. James seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 4 to 0 vote. Katie noted that the HCC values water quality and the protection of it but does not accept the Draft Ordinance as presented.
- 7. Election of a Vice Chair:** Katie noted that with Mike's resignation last month, we need to elect a vice chair. There was discussion. Katie nominated Mary. The motion was seconded by Ted and unanimously approved. Katie thanked Mary for taking on the role.
- 8. HCC FY2025/2026 Expenditures & FY2027/2028 Budget:** Matt presented a spreadsheet showing the HCC budget for the past fiscal year ending June 30th along with expenditures. Matt noted that the budget process with the Selectboard takes place in the fall. He added that it will be another tight budget year. If the HCC wants an increase, it will have to be well-justified. Matt noted that Green-Up Day costs have risen considerably in recent years and if White River Subaru didn't take on the cost of tire disposal the last two years, we would have gone way over budget. Katie noted that the HCC has not been doing an annual work plan. There was discussion about the funding by categories. Matt noted that this is the time to fine tune the amount by category. James made a motion to hold the budget at \$3,530 but move \$25 from Travel & Training and \$50 from advertising to Green-Up Day Contracted Services. The motion was seconded by Mary and unanimously approved.
- 9. Trails Day Report:** James reported that the June 6th Trails Day event was a success. About twenty people attended. A lot of work was completed including a bridge replacement and a trail sign inventory was completed. He thanked the volunteers and the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association for co-sponsoring with HCC. Katie thanked James for the excellent job organizing.
- 10. Hartford Area Career & Technology Center Work in the Town Forest:** James reported that he is working with Dan Gibson to draft a plan to formally integrate the Hartford Town Forest into the Hartford Area Career and Technology Center's curriculum. He noted that it is an ambitious plan that would likely start small with one or two activities and grow over time. James noted that there are a lot of options for the teacher to pick and choose based on the interest and career paths of the students. Katie noted the importance of good communication between the HCC and Dan Gibson. Katie asked the HCC to consider prioritizing and/or taking things out. James will send out the draft plan to the HCC again. It was agreed to discuss at the 8/31 HCC meeting. Katie thanked James for spearheading.
- 11. Town Forest Chestnut Tree Planting:** James reported that Holly attended the chestnut tree planting on June 2nd with the Hartford Area Career & Technology Center. He noted that the tree protectors used were smaller than the ones he obtained. He stated that they are fine for this year but should be replaced by the larger ones for the next growing season. James agreed to follow-up with Holly.
- 12. Town Forest Wildlife Habitat Assessment:** Katie reported that she found an excellent example of a Wildlife Habitat Assessment (WHA) by a wildlife biologist in western Massachusetts. She thinks the WHA could be tailored to what we want. She asked the HCC how comprehensive we want to be? Ted and Mary asked to see the WHA example. Katie agreed to forward the website link to the WHA Plan.

Katie suggested holding off work on the WHA until the Hartford Area Career and Technology Center agreement is completed. The HCC agreed.

- 13. Town Forest Dog Concerns:** Matt reported that the second batch of laminated dogs under owner's control signs that were posted last month have been removed once again. He noted that he investigated the cost of permanent signs. The cost is about \$100 per sign. He reported that Communications and Media Specialist J.D. Hawks posted information about dog rules on the Town website and social media. Matt asked for assistance developing the language for the permanent sign. Katie volunteered. Matt will email Katie the Dog Ordinance.
- 14. Development Applications & HCC Input:** Matt reported that he spoke to Zoning Administrator Jo-Ann Ells about HCC having a member participate in development review process. Staff will review the applications. When there is an application that has potential impacts on natural resources, staff will send the HCC representative the application and see if they have comments. Matt noted that Holly expressed an interest in it but doesn't have the time to take this on right now. Mary volunteered. Katie agreed to show Mary how to use Biofinder.
- 15. Hartford Community Coalition Block Party:** Katie reported that the Hartford Community Coalition Block Party went well. She suggested that if we are asked to take care of the event's compost again next year that we recruit volunteers. She thanked Mary for helping.
- 16. Conservator of the Year Award:** Katie reported that the Conservator of the Year Award was presented to Ben Fletcher at the June 17th Block Party. Katie noted that Ben was touched by the award. It was agreed that the award was well deserved.
- 17. Announcements/Reports:**
 - a. Upper Valley Adaptation Workgroup Energy & Climate Monthly Meet-up: Tad reported that the Upper Valley Adaptation Workgroup is starting a monthly energy and climate soirée on the 2nd Tuesday of the month at 4:30 p.m.
- 18. Upcoming HCC Events:** There are no upcoming HCC events.
- 19. Community Events:**
 - a. AVCC : <https://vtconservation.com/fall-webinars-from-the-community-wildlife-program/>
 - b. Vermont Woodlands Association: <https://vermontwoodlands.org/upcoming-events>
 - c. Vermont Coverts; Woodlands for Wildlife: <https://vtcoverts.org/calendar.html>
 - d. Upper Valley Land Trust: <https://uvlt.org/events/list/Adjournment>
- 20. Next HCC Meeting:** Katie noted that the next meeting is scheduled for Monday, 7/6 at 7:00 p.m.
- 21. Adjournment:** Mary made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Ted and approved. The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.
- 22. Action Items:**
 - a. Katie suggested that GMP use a native seed mix and will send Kevin the name of the seed company and the specific variety.
 - b. Matt will work with the Town Communications and Media Specialist to get the word out to the public about Hazen Trail closure.
 - c. The consensus of the VELCO meeting was to discuss the trailhead sign after the 2027 construction.

- d. James reported that he is plugging away on the Maanawaka Management Plan update and will continue to work on it.
- e. James made a motion to hold the HCC budget at \$3,530 but move \$25 from Travel & Training and \$50 from advertising to Green-Up Day Contracted Services.
- f. James agreed to follow-up with Holly about the tree protectors.
- g. James will continue to work on the agreement between the Town and the HAC&TC for work in the Town Forest that he will share with the HCC and discuss at the 8/31 HCC meeting.
- h. Katie agreed to forward the website link to the Wildlife Habitat Assessment that she thinks is an excellent example.
- i. Katie volunteered to assist Matt in developing the language for the permanent sign about dog rules.
- j. Matt will email Katie the Hartford Dog Ordinance.
- k. Mary volunteered to review development applications on behalf of the Conservation Commission.
- l. Katie suggested that if we are asked to take care of the event's compost again next year that we recruit volunteers. Katie agreed to show Mary how to use Biofinder.

23. HCC Member Terms: James Donahey, (7/13/29), Holly Henderson, (10/14/28), Mary Hutchins, (10/30/27), Ted Levin, (10/27/29) and Katie Mann, chair (3/20/27).