

**Approved Minutes of the
Hartford Conservation Commission
February 6, 2017**

Members Present: Dana Hazen, Mary Hutchins, Tom Kahl, Shawn Kelley and chair Jon Bouton.

Staff Present: Planner Matt Osborn.

Others Present: Hartford High School Senior Keith Illingworth.

A meeting of the Conservation Commission was held at the Hartford Town Hall, 171 Bridge Street, White River Junction on Monday, February 6, 2017 in Meeting Room 2. Chair Jon Bouton called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

1. Trails Project: High School Student Keith Illingworth was present to discuss his proposal to create more sustainable mountain bike trails in the Town Forest by focusing on trail maintenance of existing trails. Keith noted that he has extensive trail building experience having worked for the Killington Bike Park and working on trails since he was a young boy. Keith stated that this will be a senior project through the Hartford High School. His adviser is Erin Stevens. Keith presented a list of possible trail improvements in the Town Forest. The project proposal also includes trail maintenance days in the spring as well as the development of a skills park for mountain bikers and leading group rides for beginners. Keith stated that the skills park work could be done in late winter and spring and the trails work in the late spring and summer.

Jon Bouton stated that the trails work is a good idea, but noted that the HCC is presently in the middle of sorting out trails in the Town Forest through the Land Management Subcommittee (LMS). He suggested working on the sanctioned trails in the Town Forest first to provide time for the LMS to resolve the other trails. The HCC agreed.

Jon Bouton asked about maintenance of the skills park. Keith Illingworth responded that there isn't a lot of maintenance to do. There was discussion about liability of volunteers and users of the skills park. Jon Bouton responded that the Town has a volunteer liability form. For the skills park user, Keith suggested a sign.

Jon Bouton stated that he wasn't sure if the Town Forest is the right place for the skills park or not. He would like to think about it a little more. Keith Illingworth responded that the skills park could be located elsewhere. Matt Osborn suggested discussing with Parks and Recreation Department Director Tad Nunez about locating the skills park in one of the many town parks.

Mary Hutchins expressed concern about the increase in mountain bike use in the Town Forest and the impact on the forest and other users by making the Town Forest a major mountain bike destination. Others agreed.

Jon Bouton noted that trails should be properly designed. He suggested adhering to the standards of the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA). Keith responded that he is familiar with IMBA and agreed to adhere to their standards. Jon asked Matt Osborn to order a trail design book from IMBA for Keith to use.

Jon Bouton concluded by thanking Keith for coming to the meeting and discussing his proposal. He said he is excited about the project. Keith stated that he will refine his proposal and get back to the HCC. Matt noted that the HCC meets next on March 6th. We can pick up discussion then.

2. **Approval of Minutes:** Jon Bouton asked if there are any changes to the Draft Minutes of December 6th. Being none, Jon stated that the minutes are approved by unanimous consent as written.
3. **Additions/Changes to the Agenda:** Jon Bouton asked if there are any changes or additions to the agenda. Matt Osborn suggested adding Community Day and the Trails Workshop. The Commission agreed.
4. **Forest Blocks and Fragmentation:** Matt Osborn reported that in place of the January HCC Meeting, the Conservation Commission attended the Forest Blocks and Fragmentation meeting in Bradford sponsored by the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission (TRORC) and Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department (VFWD). Jon Bouton noted that the meeting presented work by VFWD that is focusing on preserving regional corridors for wildlife movement. Tom Kahl noted that in Vermont land is being developed at a higher rate than the population. Matt added that the TRORC presented clustering options to prevent fragmentation. Jon noted that the Linking Lands Alliance has been working with the VFWD forest blocks for many years. Matt added that the information was used in developing the Wildlife Connector Overlay District in the 2008 Zoning Regulations. Matt added that Fish and Wildlife Specialist Monica Przyperhart offered to meet with the HCC and discuss the forest blocks and the Hartford Natural Resource Review.
5. **Land Management Subcommittee:** Jon Bouton noted that he would like to make a few phone calls to LMS members before scheduling the next LMS Meeting. Jon suggested that the next meeting might be scheduled for the first half of March.
6. **Lower Hurricane Reservoir:** Matt Osborn reported that he received an e-mail from Scott Jensen of the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Rivers Program as a follow-up to Scott's site visit to the Lower Hurricane Reservoir in November to look at the conservation pool and consider methods to increase the size of the pool. Scott reviewed the Lower Hurricane Reservoir plans and concluded that no permitting is necessary if the Town wants to add bank run gravel to hold back more water and create a more natural outflow. Jon Bouton suggested developing an estimate of the amount of material required and a cost estimate. Tom Kahl volunteered. Dana Hazen asked if the issue is primarily aesthetic or if there are ecological benefits of making changes. There was discussion, but no clear conclusion.
7. **Town Forest Kiosk Display:** Matt Osborn reported that he is putting together materials and will be replacing the signage at the Town Forest kiosk in the next two weeks.
8. **Town Forest Recreational Planning Summit:** Matt Osborn reported that he attended a planning summit regarding the Town Forest Recreation Planning Initiative and funds that the State received to undertake a one-time grant program as a demonstration project to develop an innovative stewardship program for town forests in ten communities. The idea is to develop a good process and transfer it to other communities. Matt noted that the specifics of the grant

program are being developed and will be released in the coming months, but the idea is to use the grant funds to hire a consultant to undertake a planning process with extensive community engagement and develop stewardship plans. He noted that we might want to consider participation in the program since we need to update the Recreation Management Plan while managing the property for forest management, wildlife habitat and protection of natural resources. Matt noted that the grant project is expected to take place in 2017 and 2018. Matt stated that he will keep the HCC informed about the grant program.

- 9. High Meadows Watershed Grant:** Matt Osborn reported that the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission (TRORC) will be applying for a High Meadows Watershed Grant to do watershed public outreach and education in the Ottawaquechee River watershed. Hartford has been invited to be a partner organization. In addition, the Ottawaquechee Natural Resource Conservation District will be a participant. Jon Bouton suggested including VINS as a potential partner as well. A letter of intent is due February 10th and the application is due June 1st. TRORC and partners have been invited to a two-day workshop at the ECHO Museum in Burlington on March 24th and 25th. Matt noted that the project could accomplish recommendations in the Hartford Hazard Mitigation Plan under the Community Resilience Organization Hartford as well as water quality work of the Conservation Commission. Matt stated that TRORC is still working on the specifics of their proposal. Jon noted that conceptually he supports the project and suggested that the HCC be a participant. The HCC agreed.
- 10. HCC Brochures:** Mary Hutchins reported that she made revisions to the bear brochure. She will distribute to the HCC for the final review. Once completed, the brochure will be posted on the website and printed and distributed at the Community Day event.
- 11. Natural Resources Review:** Jon Bouton suggested meeting with Tom Kahl to review the Natural Resource spreadsheet in relation to the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department Forest Block information. Tom agreed. Matt Osborn suggested inviting new HCC member Angela Emerson.
- 12. HCC Budget:** Jon Bouton reported that he attended the Selectboard budget session on December 13th and the Selectboard was very receptive to the Conservation Commission projects. Matt Osborn reported that the final budget was distributed yesterday and it showed no changes to the Conservation line items.
- 13. Announcements/Reports:**
 - a. Recruiting New HCC Members: Matt Osborn reported that an application was submitted for the last remaining HCC opening, but the candidate is unavailable on Monday evenings so it was withdrawn.
 - b. Community Day: Jon Bouton reported that the HCC was invited to have a table at the March 4th Community Day at the Hartford High School. Jon and Tom Kahl volunteered to staff the table. Copies of HCC brochures and newsletters will be distributed.
 - c. Trails Workshop: Jon Bouton reported that Tom Kahl and he attended a trails workshop in South Woodstock on February 4th on trail design. Jon noted that there were some good recommendations.

d. Upper Valley Pollinators: Jon Bouton reported that the HCC has been invited to join a coalition of Upper Valley Conservation Commissions and other partner organizations to promote pollinating plants. Jon noted that nine events are planned for the Upper Valley in the coming months. The HCC was asked to help spread the word about the events. Matt Osborn reported that he contacted the Hartford Garden Club and they expressed an interest in partnering as well. The HCC agreed to join the coalition. Mary Hutchins volunteered to be the contact person for the HCC.

14. Next Meeting: Jon Bouton reported that the next regularly scheduled HCC meeting will be held on Monday, March 6th.

15. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m.