

Draft Minutes of the
Hartford Conservation Commission
May 3, 2021

Members Present: Jon Bouton, Angie Emerson, Mary Hutchins, Katie Mann, Lee Michaelides and chair Tom Kahl.

Staff Present: Planner Matt Osborn.

Others Present: Selectboard Liaison Dennis Brown, Carolyn Hooper and Anna Schaal.

A remote meeting of the Conservation Commission in compliance with the Vermont Open Meeting Law was held on Monday, May 3, 2021. Tom Kahl called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Tom read the Act 92 Open Meeting Law Script.

1. **Changes to the Agenda:** Tom Kahl asked if there are any changes to the agenda. There were none.
2. **Approval of Minutes:** Tom Kahl asked if there were any changes to the minutes of April 5, 2021 HCC Meeting. There were no changes. Tom stated that the minutes are approved as written by unanimous consent.
3. **Memorandum of Understanding with the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association (UVMBA):** Tom Kahl welcomed Hartford resident and UVMBA board member Anna Schaal to the meeting. Anna was present to discuss a proposed memorandum of understanding between the UVMBA and the Hartford Conservation Commission regarding management of the Town Forest trails. Anna noted that UVMBA has been transitioning from a focus on maintenance of the Boston Lot trail network to maintenance of trail networks throughout the Upper Valley. UVMBA has a network of volunteers and a trailer with tools to assist others with trail maintenance. She noted the large turnout of UVMBA members at the HCC Trails Day in the Town Forest in September, 2019. UVMBA presently uses Trailforks, which is a trail database, map and management system for users and trail groups and has found it to be very helpful in dispersing information to mountain bikers about trail conditions. Anna noted that the Town Forest trail network is relatively small with 12 miles of trails and the degree of difficulty is easy to moderate. As a result, hard core mountain bikers are not likely to bike in the Town Forest. The MOU asks for a three-year commitment and UVMBA would like to post a notice about UVMBA at the trailhead kiosk.

Katie Mann noted that there is a lack of research on the effect of leaf blowing of mountain bike trails. She would like to have research that determines the impact of leaf blowing. Katie asked Anna about the UVMBA position on leaf blowing. Anna responded that they feel in instances it is necessary to show riders where the trail is to avoid new trail sections from popping up since riders can't follow the trail.

Jon Bouton commented that he is concerned about the impact of recreational trails on wildlife. Anna stated that UVMBA is taking trail stewardship to a new level. They encourage their members to use trails responsibly. Jon stated that he is glad to have an organization to work with on trail maintenance.

Tom thanked Anna for coming to the HCC meeting.

Katie suggested that the HCC review the MOU and modify it to meet the HCC goals for the trail network. The HCC agreed. Lee Michaelides noted that UVMBA has done a very good job managing the Boston Lot trails and informing members. Angie Emerson stated that the MOU is a step forward. Tom asked the HCC if the HCC should adopt the MOU. The HCC voted 6 to 0 to endorse the MOU and agreed to work on the specific language. Tom will inform Anna of the HCC's decision.

4. **Green-Up Day:** Matt Osborn reported that the 2021 Green-Up Day was successful. Both Quechee and Town Hall dumpsters were nearly full and we had a good turnout on Green-Up Day. He stated that without in-person registration again this year, there is no way of knowing the total number of volunteers as many people picked up bags without registering. He added that many folks registered on-line and he received many e-mails or calls to register. Matt thinks the turnout was higher than in 2020 with more participation from businesses and organizations. He thanked Katie Mann for creating the on-line registration and staffing the table at the Town Hall Green-Up Day. He also thanked Tom for helping him deliver items to the Hartford Solid Waste facility and Jon for doing green-up and using his pick-up truck. Tom thanked Matt for his efforts as Green-Up Day Coordinator. For the next meeting, Matt will provide the HCC with the specific results from Green-Up Day. It was noted that numerous hypodermic needles were found along the roads this year, and it was discussed that next year we should include specific safety information for Green-Up participants.

5. **Town Forest:**

- a. Winter 2022 Timber Harvest: Matt Osborn reported that County Forester A.J. Follensbee received preliminary approval from the Department of Public Works for the proposed access to the log landing from Reservoir Road. Matt noted that he is presently working on converting A.J.'s bid sheet and description to the Town's standard Request for Proposals format as well as the contract document. He has been in touch with A.J. and hopes to complete both documents this week. Matt agreed to seek Town approval of both documents.

Tom noted that he prepared a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Town, Cover Home Repair and Richard Wright for the hemlock to be cut by the logger in the Town Forest and delivered to the Wright Sawmill for ramp construction projects that Cover does in Hartford. The HCC also will use hemlock for bridge decking in the Town Forest. Matt agreed to seek Town approval of the MOU.

Dennis Brown reported that he was in the Town Forest recently and noticed a lot of dead or dying pine trees. He asked if we should ask the logger to take them down. Jon Bouton responded that it would be expensive to remove dead or dying pine trees and they don't have much monetary value. He suggested that the trees be left since they have an important ecological/wildlife benefit.

- b. Recreation Management Plan. Matt Osborn reported that he made the request to get the Recreation Management Plan on the Selectboard agenda and he is awaiting word. Matt, Tom and Angie agreed to meet to work on the presentation to the Selectboard.
- c. Compilation of Town Forest Management Plans: Angie Emerson reported that she has been working with Jon Bouton on a compilation/summary of the different management plans for the Town Forest. She thinks it is important for residents and new commission members to be aware of the history of management in the Town Forest and be able to read a summary. Angie agreed to work on a draft of the compilation. Tom thanked Angie for taking the lead on the compilation and Jon for his assistance.
- d. 2021 Trail Maintenance: Tom Kahl reported that on April 30th, the Trails Committee met with the mountain bike community to look at several high priority trail segments in preparation for a spring trail maintenance outing. He noted that the trail sections included Simonds Way, the west Side loop and Jill's Trail. Tom agreed to develop a materials list. It was agreed to schedule the trails day for Saturday, June 19th which had been previously discussed during the April 30th site visit. The HCC also agreed to similar to 2020 have a virtual trail sign-up for routine trail maintenance and Katie agreed to set up the registration form.

- e. Wayfinding Signs. Matt Osborn reported that he contacted White River Junction VTrans office and was told that a state permit would be needed to mount the wayfinding signs in the State right-of-way. Matt has the contact person and will follow-up with him. Matt also reported that the Department of Public Works is OK with mounting wayfinding signs on town road street signs. Matt agreed to price-out the signs and seek approval to purchase them.
 - f. Trails Map: Tom Kahl reported that Dana Hazen has been making changes to the Trails Map and they look great. Dana will be finishing up the changes soon.
 - g. Trail Signs: Tom Kahl reported that once Dana is finished with the Trails map changes, Tim Schaal is ready to make the trail signs. He asked the HCC if it is OK for Tim to begin work on the trail signs before the Selectboard adopts the Recreation Management Plan. The HCC agreed. Tom agreed to tell Tim Schaal.
 - h. Story Walk and Scavenger Hunt Request: Tom Kahl reported that Kate Schaal of the Quechee Library requested permission to hold a Story Walk and Scavenger Hunt at the Town Forest. He stated that it is a great thing to get families out in the Town Forest. The HCC agreed. Katie Mann suggested directing them to wider trails for safety reasons, and Jon volunteered to help with ideas for the Scavenger Hunt. The HCC agreed. Tom agreed to follow-up with Kate Schaal.
 - i. Vernal Pool Walk: Jon Bouton reported that he participated in a vernal pool walk in the Town Forest sponsored by the Parks and Recreation Department and Vital Communities and included Kevin Toland of the Vermont Center for Ecostudies. Jon noted that it was a successful event with 16 people attending.
 - j. Hartford School Project: Jon Bouton reported that he spoke to Steve Gagliardone and Kit Farnsworth of the Hartford cognitive disabilities program about possible projects in the Town Forest including a pollinator garden. Jon will be setting up a follow-up discussion with them and Angie Emerson volunteered to help out with a pollinator garden.
6. **Private Landowner Outreach**: Tom Kahl reported that he will set up a meeting with a Jericho property owner that he spoke with last fall. Katie Mann agreed to work on maps for the next ten property owners of ranked parcels in Hartford in May and June. Matt agreed to verify ownership records.
 7. **Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions (AVCC) Tiny Grant Program**: Matt Osborn reported that he submitted the grant application on behalf of the local resident Hartford Salamander Team, to partner with the North Branch Nature Center on their Amphibian Road Crossing (ARC) program. Tom reported that the Hartford Salamander Team has been busy this spring on rainy nights at key road crossings shepherding amphibians safely across.
 8. **Climate Action Plan Report**: Mary Hutchins reported that Climate Action Team has been prioritizing strategies and actions for the Climate Action Plan (CAP). A draft of the CAP is expected in the coming weeks and will be available for the public to review.
 9. **Invasive Plant Promotion**: Jon Bouton reported that he is providing the Parks and Recreation Department with information on invasive plants to distribute through the Constant Contact weekly e-mail.

- 10. Game of Logging Classes:** Jon Bouton reported that the Hartford Area Career Technology Center is sponsoring the Game of Logging classes in the Town Forest on May 15th, May 22nd and May 23rd.
- 11. HCC Logo:** Matt Osborn reported that he was asked for the HCC logo by the Parks and Recreation Department for the invasive plant promotional information that Jon has prepared. The HCC doesn't have a logo. Mary Hutchins volunteered to work on it. Dennis Brown noted that in recent years, the Town has encouraged uniformity. Mary agreed to look at the other Town of Hartford logos.
- 12. Announcements/Other Business:**
- a. HCC Expenditures: With the end of the fiscal year approaching, Tom Kahl requested a list of HCC expenditures since the end of the last fiscal year. Matt Osborn agreed.
- 13. Next Meeting:** Tom Kahl reported that the next HCC meeting is scheduled for Monday, June 7th at 7:00 p.m. He asked if the meeting could be in-person and outside. Matt Osborn noted that a representative from the Upper Valley Land Trust (UVLT) will be attending to discuss a possible conservation easement for the Town Forest. He suggested asking the UVLT what they prefer. The HCC agreed.
- 14. Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 8:55 p.m.
- 15. Meeting Action Items:**
- a) The HCC agreed to work on the specific language of a memorandum of Understanding with the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association.
- b) For the 6/7 meeting, Matt will provide the HCC with the specific results from Green-Up Day.
- c) Matt agreed to seek Town approval of the bid documents for the timber harvest.
- d) Matt agreed to seek Town approval on a MOU with Cover Home Repair, the Town and Richard Wright to make hemlock available for ramp construction projects that Cover does in Hartford.
- e) Matt, Tom and Angie agreed to meet to work on the updated HTF Recreational Plan presentation to the Selectboard.
- f) Angie agreed to work on a draft of the compilation of the Town Forest Management Plans.
- g) Tom agreed to develop a materials list for the 6/19 Trails Day.
- h) Katie agreed to set up the registration form for folks who want to conduct trails maintenance on their own throughout the summer.
- i) Matt agreed to price-out the wayfinding signs, work on state approval and seek approval from the Town to purchase the signs.
- j) Dana will be finishing up changes to the Trails Map.
- k) Tom agreed to talk to Tim Schaal about the new Trails Signs.
- l) Tom agreed to follow-up with Kate Schaal about the Story Walk and Scavenger Hunt.
- m) Angie volunteered to help out with the pollinator garden.
- n) Tom reported that he will set up a meeting with a Jericho property owner that he spoke with last fall.
- o) Katie agreed to work on maps for the next ten property owners of ranked parcels in Hartford in May and June.
- p) Matt agreed to verify ownership records.
- q) Jon volunteered to continue to collect information and provide it to the Parks and Recreation Department for their weekly Constant Contact release.
- r) Mary Hutchins volunteered to work on a logo for HCC.
- s) Mary agreed to look at other Town of Hartford logos for uniformity.
- t) Matt agreed to obtain a list of HCC expenditures since the end of the last fiscal year.