

Draft Minutes of the
Hartford Conservation Commission
January 3, 2022

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

Staff Present: Planner Matt Osborn.

Others Present: Windsor County Forester A.J. Follensbee and Selectboard Liaison Dennis Brown.

A Conservation Commission Meeting was held on Monday, January 3rd at 7:00 p.m. in Room 2 of the Hartford Town Hall at 171 Bridge Street, White River Junction. The meeting was also accessible remotely via MS Teams and several people participated that way. Chair Tom Kahl called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Tom proceeded to read the Hybrid Meeting Script followed by roll call. Tom welcomed new member Ted Levin. He asked Ted to introduce himself to the Commission. Ted stated that he is a naturalist/writer whose articles have appeared in many publications. He is an avid birder. Although Ted recently moved to Hartford, he noted that he has resided in the Upper Valley for 46 years.

1. **Changes to the Agenda:** Tom Kahl noted that forester A.J. Follensbee is present to talk about the Town Forest timber harvest. He suggested moving the item to the front of the agenda. The HCC agreed. Tom asked if there are any other changes to the agenda. There were none.
2. **Approval of Minutes:** Tom Kahl asked if there are any changes to the Minutes of the December 6, 2021 HCC Meeting. There were no changes. Tom stated that the minutes are approved as written by unanimous consent.
3. **Town Forest Timber Harvest:** Matt Osborn reported that he has reached out to the seven Reservoir Road property owners to provide an update on the Town Forest timber harvest. So far, he has spoken to four of the residents and left voice mail messages for two others. Matt noted that residents expressed concern about the increase in recreational use of the Town Forest as well as the increase in traffic on Reservoir Road over the years. Two residents also expressed concern about use of the north landing given the proximity to their residence. Several noted the decrease in wildlife sightings in recent years due to the increased recreational use.

Matt suggested Monday, January 31st for the date of the hybrid community meeting on the timber harvest. He asked A.J. Follensbee if he is available. A.J. is available. The HCC agreed to a 6:00 p.m. meeting. Matt agreed to send letters about the meeting to Town Forest abutters and to promote the meeting using a variety of means. Tom Kahl suggested that Matt, A.J. and Tom meet to discuss the presentation. The HCC agreed. A.J. offered to do a tour of the timber harvest area if there is community interest. He suggested Saturday, February 5th or Saturday, February 12th. It was agreed that if there is public interest to hold the tour at 10:00 a.m on February 5th.

Tom Kahl asked A.J. if Longview Forest has agreed to conduct the timber harvest during the winter of 2022/2023. A.J. responded that Longview wants to pursue the timber harvest. Jon Bouton noted that mill prices could change in the next year.

4. **Private Landowner Conservation Outreach:** Tom Kahl gave a brief history of the HCC effort to contact property owners who own property that has high natural resource value. In 2015/2016, the HCC conducted an analysis and ranked properties townwide based on natural resource value. In 2019, the HCC sent letters to owners of the top 10 ranked parcels. In 2020, letters were sent to owners of the next ten highest ranked parcels. Tom noted that some owners have accepted the HCC offer to meet on site with Tom Kahl and Jon Bouton.

Katie Mann reported that the letters and maps are ready to be mailed to property owners. Tom Kahl thanked Katie for preparing the letters and maps for the mailing. Matt agreed to send out the letters and maps to property owners this week.

5. Town Forest:

- a. Memorandum of Understanding with the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association: Matt Osborn reported that on Thursday, Matt and Tom will be meeting with Liz Burdette, President of the UVMBA to discuss revisions to the MOU.
- b. Recreation Management Plan. Matt Osborn reported that the Recreation Management Plan was finalized and posted on the HCC webpage along with the revised trails map. Tom Kahl thanked Matt and noted that since the project has been completed, we can now take the item off future HCC agendas.
- c. Integrated Management Plans & Inventories for the Town Forest. Angie Emerson reported that she has completed a draft of the consolidated Plan that integrates the many Town Forest plans and inventories. For new member Ted Levin's benefit, she gave a brief explanation of the purpose. Tom Kahl noted that we have 20+ years of reports that need to be consolidated into one document. Angie noted that there are five sections to the Plan:
 1. History and Description of the Town Forest
 2. Timber Management
 3. Forest Integrity
 4. Recreation Management
 - a. Wildlife Habitat Assessment
 - b. Bird Habitat Assessment
 - c. Amphibian Inventory
 - d. Bat Inventory
 5. Current Goals/Work Program

Angie suggested including the Town Forest survey and wetlands agreement into the consolidated plan. Matt Osborn suggested including the trails map since it has a great deal of information on it. The HCC agreed. Angie asked the HCC to think about other items that should be added to the consolidated plan.

Angie suggested that the HCC review each of the plans/inventories at upcoming HCC meetings. The HCC agreed. It was agreed to start with the Wildlife Habitat Assessment at the February 7th HCC meeting. Tom asked if the HCC wanted hard copies of the Assessment, and four members said yes. Matt will provide these and let the HCC members know when they are available. Matt also noted that he will provide a copy of the Hartford Town Forest wetland agreement with the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources.

- d. Wayfinding Signs. Matt Osborn reported that the wayfinding signs were installed by the Hartford Department of Public Works. Tom Kahl noted that since the project has been completed, we can now take the item off future HCC agendas.
- e. HACTC Natural Resources Class: Matt reported that Town Manager Tracy Yarlott Davis approved the request from Natural Resources teacher Matt Dragon to remove two cord of wood they had cut as an approved thinning in the Town Forest to be processed as fire wood off site,

f. Downed Trees: Tom Kahl noted that Dennis Brown reported trees in the Hurricane Forest Wildlife Refuge and Town Forest that had come down recently across trails. Tom noted that the HACTC helped remove downed trees this past fall and hoped they might be able to assist with the current downed trees. Tom noted that Hartford Recreation Director Scott Hausler said that he would contact Natural Resources teacher Matt Dragon about the downed trees.

6. **American Kestrel Nest Boxes**: Ted Levin reported that the American Kestrel, the smallest member of the falcon family, is in decline in New England due to the reduction in farmland and meadows. He proposes building and erecting Kestrel nest boxes around Hartford. Ted reported that he met neighbors who live on Kings Highway that are willing to be a host for a nest box in their meadow. He noted that Hartford has lots of Kestrel habitat and he would like to find other willing property owners to house nest boxes. Kestrels arrive to the Upper Valley annually in March and April. Ted stated that the Kestrel is a gorgeous bird to watch. Jon Bouton made a motion for the HCC to take on this project. The motion was seconded by Mary Hutchins and unanimously approved. Mary suggested contacting the Maplerow Farm about a hosting a nest box. Ted will provide a Kestrel box for a neighbor in 2022 and pursue landowner permission for future nest boxes.

7. **2022 Conservation Commission Goals & Priorities**: Tom Kahl stated that it is time to do an annual review of the HCC goals and priorities for 2022. Angie Emerson suggested including metrics to monitor progress. The HCC agreed. The following are the goals and priorities for 2022:

Conservation:

1. Review of the Town Forest plans and inventories and create one unified document.
2. Send letters to ten private landowners who have land of high natural resource value.
3. Continue invasive plant mitigation on Town conservation land and host a workday in the Town Forest to remove Honeysuckle.
4. Continue implementation of the 2020 Forest Management Plan for the Town Forest.
5. Initiate an American Kestrel Nest Box Program beginning with one nest box in 2022 and five more in 2023.
6. Host the annual Green-Up Day event in May.
7. Collaborate with the White River Partnership on the annual Source to the Sea Clean-up in September.
8. Collaborate with the Tree Board on 2022 Year of the Tree.

Recreation:

1. Town Forest Trails Work including installation of updated trail signs and trail work days.

Education:

1. HCC sponsored events (snowshoe outing, vernal pool walk & invasive plant outing)
2. Public outreach and education regarding forest management in the Town Forest including interpretive signs and walks with the County Forester.

8. **February 12th Mammal Ecology Snowshoe Outing**: Angie volunteered to lead and Ted to assist in a Saturday February 12 Mammal Ecology Snowshoe hike at 10:00 am in the Town Forest.

- 9. Forest Interpretive Signs:** Jon Bouton volunteered to provide five forest interpretive poster signs in the Hartford Town Forest.
- 10. Wetlands Complaint:** Matt Osborn reported that he had nothing new to report on from the Regional State Wetlands Specialist regarding a wetlands complaint made by a Wilder resident last summer. Matt noted that the project is on their “to-do list”. Matt agreed to keep the HCC informed.
- 11. Next Meeting:** Tom Kahl reported that the next HCC meeting is scheduled for Monday, February 7th at 7:00 p.m. Matt reported that the Town is pursuing improving the audio for hybrid meetings.
- 12. Adjournment:** Jon Bouton made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mary Hutchins and approved. The meeting was adjourned at 8:48 p.m.
- 13. Meeting Action Items:**
- a. Matt agreed to send out natural resource letters to property owners this week.
 - b. It was agreed to hold a hybrid community meeting on forest management and the timber harvest with A.J. on January 31st and follow up with a walking tour on Saturday, February 5th if there is community interest.
 - c. Matt agreed to send letters about the meeting to Town Forest abutters and to promote the meeting using a variety of means.
 - d. Tom, Matt, and A.J. agreed to meet to discuss the Town Forest presentation.
 - e. It was agreed to discuss the Town Forest Wildlife Habitat Assessment at the February 7th HCC meeting and Matt will provide hardcopies for four HCC members.
 - f. Matt and Tom agreed to meet with the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association regarding the Memorandum of Understanding.
 - g. Jon Bouton agreed to inquire with the US Forest Service about leaf blowing on recreational trails.
 - h. Matt agreed to keep the HCC and resident who made the wetlands complaint apprised about the State Wetlands Biologist review.
 - i. Angie and Ted agreed to lead a February 12th Mammal Ecology snowshoe outing in the Town Forest.
 - j. Jon volunteered to provide five forest interpretive signs in the Town Forest.