

Approved Minutes of the
Hartford Conservation Commission
January 4, 2021

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

Staff Present: Planner Matt Osborn.

Others Present: Selectboard Liaison Emma Behrens.

A remote meeting of the Conservation Commission in compliance with the Vermont Open Meeting Law was held on Monday, January 4, 2021. Tom Kahl called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Tom read the Act 92 Open Meeting Law Script.

1. **Additions/Changes to the Agenda:** Tom Kahl asked if there are any changes or additions to the agenda. There were none.
2. **Approval of Minutes:** Tom Kahl asked if there were any changes to the minutes of December 7, 2020 HCC Meeting. There were no changes. Tom stated that the minutes are approved as written by unanimous consent.
3. **Town Forest Recreation Management Plan (RMP):** Tom Kahl noted that Matt Osborn prepared revisions to the Recreation Management Plan based on comments made at the December 7th HCC meeting. Tom suggested adding a definition of a Class 1 e-bike. The HCC agreed. There was discussion about whether to close some trails due to the high density of trails and their impact on wildlife. There also was concern expressed about steep sections of trails and possible erosion. After discussing, the HCC agreed not to close any trails at this time and to monitor trail conditions going forward. It also was agreed to focus on the 2018 Trails Assessment, incorporate into the trail maintenance work plan and work closely with the mountain bike community. Tom Kahl stated that the next step is to get the revised RMP up on the town website and to distribute to those who attended the October 21st community meeting. Matt agreed to follow-up on that. After allowing time for public comment, the HCC will then request getting on a Selectboard agenda to present the Recreation Management Plan and request their approval.
4. **HCC 2021 Goals and Objectives:** Tom Kahl stated that it is time to do an annual review of HCC goals and objectives for 2021. The HCC came up with the following list:

Conservation:

1. Review of the Town Forest plans and inventories and create one unified document.
2. Private landowner conservation outreach.
3. Stream restoration and resiliency work in the Town Forest.
4. Invasive plant mitigation on Town conservation land.
5. Consider a conservation easement for the Town Forest.
6. Forest management in the Town Forest.

Recreation:

1. Town Forest Trails Work including trails map updates, trail signs, wayfinding signs and trail work days.

Education:

1. HCC sponsored events (snowshoe outing, vernal pool walk & invasive plant outing).
2. Public outreach regarding forest management in the Town Forest.
3. Town Forest ecology.
4. Participate in the Hartford Community Coalition Block Party.

- 5. Invasive Plant Inventory from Hartford Resident:** Tom Kahl reported that Hartford resident Kirsten Arnesen-Trunzo contacted the HCC about several sites in White River Junction that have concentrations of garlic mustard. Katie Mann responded that garlic mustard is easy to pull. Jon Bouton responded that the HCC could help remove the plants. Matt Osborn noted that the sites appear to be in town right-of way, state right-of way and private property. Dana Hazen volunteered to look at the sites in late May with Kirsten Arnesen-Trunzo and come up with an action plan. Matt will contact Kirsten and confirm our plan with her.
- 6. HCC Budget:** Jon Bouton reported that he sent a memo to the Selectboard acknowledging the budget challenges, the HCC's disappointment in not being funded \$3,000 for the conservation fund this year and encouraging them to allocate the funds in the next FY budget. He reported that he received an e-mail response from Selectboard Chair Dan Fraser thanking him for the e-mail. Emma Behrens stated that the Selectboard discussed the HCC e-mail at a Selectboard meeting. Emma suggested contacting the Selectboard early in next year's budget process in July. The HCC agreed.
- 7. Town Forest:**
- a. Winter 2022 Timber Harvest: Tom Kahl reported that County Forester A.J. Follensbee revised the brochure to be posted at the Town Forest Kiosk informing the public about the forest management in the Town Forest and the proposed 2022 timber harvest. Matt Osborn agreed to contact A.J. about posting brochure inside the kiosk. Tom noted that A.J. has identified an alternative log landing and skid road for the timber harvest and invited the HCC to conduct a site visit with him. All members were interested in attending the site visit. Tom agreed to work out a time with A.J. for the site visit and contact the HCC.
 - b. Wayfinding Signs. Matt Osborn reported that he contacted Department of Public Works (DPW) Director Hannah Tyler about wayfinding signs directing people to the Town Forest. Hannah responded that DPW doesn't have any specifications but is supportive of the idea. Matt presented a photo of a wayfinding sign stating "river access" with an arrow at the corner of Norwich Avenue and Passumpsic Avenue. The sign measures 12" x 18". Matt suggested fabricating signs the same size with the arrow and "Town Forest". The HCC agreed. Matt will identify specific sites for the signs and coordinate with DPW.
 - c. Trails Map: Dana Hazen reported that he will work on revisions to the Trails Map and complete by the end of the week. Tom Kahl suggested that Dana distribute the revised map to the HCC before it is released to the mountain bike community and the public. The HCC agreed.
 - d. Hartford High School Outreach: Jon Bouton agreed to contact teacher Mary Bouchard to discuss potential HTF student projects such as establishing a pollinator garden or interpretive signage. Angie Emerson reiterated her interest in working on a pollinator project.
- 8. Pursue Stream Restoration Project:** Jon Bouton suggested that the HCC consider doing something on Town property to start such as the rip-rap outflow of the former reservoirs. The HCC agreed to consider.

9. Climate Action Plan Report: Mary Hutchins reported that the Committee is busy working with the consultant on planning for the various committees for the kick-off meeting on January 13th as well as budgeting.

10. Announcements:

- a. VNRC Grant: Tom Kahl announced that the Vermont Natural Resource Council released a press release on their smart growth grant program. Applications are due February 1st. Matt Osborn noted that the 2/1 deadline is for the \$3,000 grant and that grants up to \$1,500 are available on a rolling basis. Matt will investigate. Dana Hazen suggested purchasing trail counters. Lee Michaelides agreed that it would be very helpful for planning purposes in the Town Forest. Katie Mann volunteered to contact the U.V. Trails Alliance to see if we could borrow their trail counters.
- b. Indigenous Peoples Partnership. Katie Mann suggested that the HCC partner with an indigenous organization for educational purposes. The HCC agreed. Katie volunteered to pursue.
- c. Trail Planning 2021. Katie Mann suggested that the Trail Committee start planning trails work in the Town Forest for the spring/summer 2021. The HCC agreed.
- d. Angie Emerson's Term on HCC. Matt Osborn reported that Angie's term is expiring this month. Angie responded that she will apply to renew her term. Emma Behrens noted that to re-apply, one needs only to e-mail the Town Manager's office.

11. Next Meeting: Tom Kahl reported that the next HCC meeting is scheduled for Monday, February 1st at 7:00 p.m.

12. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:58 p.m.

13. Meeting Action Items:

- a) Matt will get the revised RMP up on the town website and to distribute to those who attended the October 21st community meeting.
- b) Dana volunteered to look at the garlic mustard sites identified in White River Junction in late May with resident Kirsten Arnesen-Trunzo and come up with an action plan. Matt will contact Kirsten Arnesen-Trunzo and let her know our proposed plan.
- c) The HCC will contact the Selectboard in July about including the conservation fund in the FY22 budget.
- d) Matt agreed to contact A.J. Follensbee about posting a brochure on forest management and the 2022 planned timber harvest inside the kiosk.
- e) Tom agreed to work out a time with A.J. Follensbee for a site visit to the Town Forest to look at sites for a log landing and skid road and follow-up with the HCC.
- f) Matt will identify specific sites for the Town Forest wayfinding signs and coordinate with the Department of Public Works.
- g) Dana volunteered to update the comprehensive Forest and Wildlife Refuge Trails Map.
- h) Jon agreed to contact teacher Mary Bouchard about possible student projects in the Town Forest.
- i) The HCC agreed to consider a stream restoration project in the Town Forest.
- j) Matt agreed to investigate the Vermont Natural Resource Council smart growth grant program.
- k) Katie volunteered to contact the Upper Valley Trails Alliance to inquire about borrowing trail counters.
- l) Katie volunteered to contact an indigenous organization about a partnership for educational purposes.
- m) The Trails Committee (Tom, Katie & Matt) agreed to start planning trails work in the Town Forest for the spring/summer 2021.