

**Approved Minutes of the**  
Hartford Conservation Commission  
January 8, 2024

**Members Present:** Chris Beetham, (8/7/27) Sky Claud, (7/31/27) Mike Harris, (8/7/27) Mary Hutchins, (10/30/27) Ted Levin, (11/15/25) vice-chair Katie Mann (3/20/27) and chair Tom Kahl (8/24/24).

**Staff Present:** Town Planner Matt Osborn.

**Others Present:** Selectboard Liaison Mary Erdei and Ben Fletcher of the Hartford Salamander Team.

A hybrid Hartford Conservation Commission (HCC) Meeting in compliance of the Open Meeting Law was held on Monday, January 8th in Room 2 of the Hartford Town Hall located at 171 Bridge Street, White River Junction. Chair Tom Kahl called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and proceeded to read the Hybrid Meeting Script followed by roll call.

1. **Approval of Minutes:** Tom asked if there are any changes to the draft minutes of 12/4/23. There were none. Tom stated that the HCC minutes of 12/4/23 are approved as written by unanimous consent.
2. **Public Comments:** Tom asked if there are any public comments. There were none.
3. **Conservation Educational Events:** Sky Claud reported that the first of the young family outdoor education events is scheduled for Sunday, February 4<sup>th</sup> at 10am in the Town Forest. The idea is to introduce young families to the woods. The Town Forest will serve as the classroom. Sky stated that the event is geared toward elementary school students, but older children can attend as well. Katie Mann asked if Sky would like attendees to RSVP. She responded yes. Katie suggested naming the event the “Family Forest Frolic”. The HCC agreed. Ben Fletcher of the Hartford Salamander Team will be assisting Sky. The HCC agreed to pay for hot chocolate if Sky wants to purchase it for the event. Katie volunteered to help get the word out to Hartford elementary schools. Matt Osborn volunteered to create a flyer and distribute it.
4. **Environmental Stewardship Mix & Mingle:** Tom reported that ten groups have agreed to participate in the February 29<sup>th</sup> event. Matt noted that the Junction Arts & Media (JAM) will be recording the event. Matt suggested providing refreshments. Katie volunteered to reach out to local businesses about food donations. Tom suggested that if organizations plan to have a powerpoint presentation that they submit it the week before the event. The HCC agreed. The following organizations and their contact person have agreed to participate in the event:
  1. Vermont Institute of Natural Science – Jim Armbruster
  2. Vermont Center for Ecostudies – Jason Hill
  3. Hartford Garden Club – Clare Forseth
  4. Hartford Tree Board – Jeff Arnold
  5. Hartford Climate Action Committee – John Reid and Dana Clawson
  6. Hartford Salamander Team – Ben Fletcher
  7. White River Partnership –
  8. Upper Valley Land Trust –
  9. Resilient Hartford -
  10. Conservation Commission – Mike Harris
5. **Great River Hydro (GRH) Wilder Dam Relicensing:** Matt noted that the Wilder Dam is going through a relicensing application before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. The GRH application includes three dams in Vermont/New Hampshire Wilder, Bellows Fall and Vernon). Since

the permit will last for 30-50 years, the Connecticut River Conservancy (CRC) is recommending that stakeholders use the permit process to “improve the health of the river”. CRC is participating in the formal proceedings and is encouraging stakeholders including municipalities to comment to the FERC. The following is CRC webpage on the application process: <https://www.ctriver.org/our-work/hydropower/> Matt asked Mike Harris if he is familiar with the FERC application process. Mike responded yes and volunteered to put together some recommendations to present to the HCC at the 2/5 meeting. Matt noted that Town staff will be submitting recommendations to the Selectboard that will include the Conservation Commission comments. Mary Erdei emphasized the importance of obtaining public input into the process.

6. **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association (UVMBA):** Matt reported that he reached out to Liz Burdette of the UVMBA about the MOU and requested a Certificate of Insurance. Once we receive it, Matt will present the MOU to the Hartford Town Manager.
7. **Trail Inventory/List of Potential Projects:** Chris reported that although there was a snow free period, they were unable to undertake a survey of Town Forest trails. Chris stated that we will now have to wait until spring to do the inventory. Chris noted that it is important to develop a list of trail projects to be ready to apply for a future grant. The HCC agreed. Tom will send Chris a list of the trail projects from previous years that have not yet been undertaken.
8. **Town Forest Invasive Plants:** Katie reported that the invasive plant workday in the Town Forest to treat honeysuckle and garlic mustard is scheduled for Saturday, April 20<sup>th</sup>. Mike noted that there is an invasive plant app that provides coordinates of invasives. He thinks it might be useful for the HCC to use.
9. **Hartford Area Career & Technology Center (HAC&TC) Natural Resources Class:** Tom reported that the HAC&TC class has been working in the Town Forest but is not exactly sure what they have done. Matt volunteered to contact Natural Resources teacher Matt Dragon to get an update.
10. **Bliss Road Class 4 Section:** Matt reported that he has been conducting research on the Orrizonto Road. Back in the late 1990s, the Selectboard discontinued the Class 4 section of Orrizonto Road and established a recreational easement. Matt is meeting with Bliss Road resident Steve Cary tomorrow to discuss options for the Class IV section of Bliss Road.
11. **HCC Award:** Tom reported that Lee Michaelides prepared a description of the HCC award program. He asked if HCC had any comments about the proposal. Mike responded that we should set dates for the award. The HCC agreed. After discussing, the HCC decided on an April 1<sup>st</sup> nomination deadline. The HCC will review nominations at the April HCC meeting and make a final decision at the May meeting so that the award be presented at the Hartford Community Coalition Block Party in June. Matt noted that the HCC will have to receive approval from the Selectboard to establish the program and to erect a plaque in the Town Hall, and he will begin this approval process with the Administration. Mary Erdei thought that the Selectboard would be in favor.
12. **Pollinator Pathways:** Sky reported that she will be leading the planting of a pollinator garden this year at the White River School. Katie has talked with the White River School administration. They support this project and students will be involved. Sky developed a list of plants showing their blooming time and that the goal is to have constant blooms throughout the growing season. Katie reported that the Quechee Garden Club received a grant and can help purchase supplies and seeds. She also emphasized the importance of establishing educational signage. Matt reported that Resilient

Hartford has decided to establish a pollinator garden at the Clifford Park Food Forest in West Hartford.

**13. Amphibian Trapping Permit:** Katie noted that Vermont Center for Ecostudies can't take on submitting the required permit application to the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department necessary to trap amphibians for the annual vernal pool walk. Matt asked Chris Beetham if he can still take this on. Chris responded yes if he knows what he needs to do and when. Matt agreed to reach out to Jon Bouton and convey the information to Chris.

**14. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Land Protection Grant:** Tom reported that the deadline for the Nature Conservancy grant is the end of February. Since we don't have a specific project at this time, we aren't ready to submit an application. Tom thinks the HCC needs to plan ahead to be ready to submit grant applications in the future. The HCC agreed. Mike noted that there are state and federal initiatives with funding available. Mike volunteered to put together a toolbox for the HCC to do long-term land conservation planning. Katie stated that she thinks the HCC should advocate for wildlife corridors.

**15. Upcoming Events:**

- a. **Natural History Walk:** Town Forest on Saturday, 1/20 at 10:00 a.m
- b. **Family Forest Frolic:** Town Forest on Sunday, 2/4 at 10:00 a.m.
- c. **Environmental Stewardship Mix & Mingle:** Bugbee Senior Center Thursday, 2/29 at 6:00 p.m.
- d. **Town Forest Invasive Plant Removal:** Saturday, 4/20.
- e. **Hartford Town Forest Salamander Meander:** Saturday 4/27.
- f. **Green Up Day:** Saturday 5/4.
- g. **Hartford Town Forest Bird Walk:** Saturday 5/18.

**16. Next HCC Meeting:** Tom noted that the next meeting is scheduled for Monday, 2/5 at 7:00 p.m.

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

**18. Action Items:**

- a. Sky will lead a family hike (Family Forest Frolic) in the Town Forest on Saturday, February 4<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 a.m.
- b. Katie volunteered to help get the word out to Hartford elementary schools about the Family Forest Frolic.
- c. Matt volunteered to create a flyer for the Family Forest Frolic and distribute it.
- d. Katie volunteered to reach out to local businesses about food donations for the Environmental Stewardship Mix & Mingle event.
- e. Mike volunteered to put together some recommendations to present to the HCC at the 2/5 meeting regarding the Wilder Dam relicensing.
- f. Once the Town receives the Certificate of Insurance for the UVMBA, he will present the MOU to the Town Manager.
- g. Ted Levin will lead a winter ecology walk in the Town Forest on Saturday, January 20<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 a.m.
- h. Chris noted that we will likely have to wait until spring to conduct the trail inventory.
- i. Matt volunteered to contact Natural Resources teacher Matt Dragon to get an update of the work the class is doing in the Town Forest.
- j. Matt will meet with Bliss Road resident Steve Cary to discuss options for the Class IV section of Bliss Road.
- k. Mike volunteered to put together a toolbox for the HCC to do long-term planning.

- l. The HCC will have to request approval from the Selectboard to establish the award program and to erect a plaque in the Town Hall. Matt will begin this approval process.
- m. Ted will lead a spring bird walk in the Town Forest on Saturday, May 18<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 a.m.
- n. The HCC will hold the Environmental Stewardship Mix & Mingle on February 29<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 p.m. at the Bugbee Senior Center.
- o. Ted will contact Judy Barwood (Christian St) to confirm a location and details for installing a Kestrel box installed in an open meadow on her property.
- p. Mary will contact landowners Corabel Amal (Jericho Road) to see if she is interested in a Kestrel box for her property.
- q. Matt agreed to reach out to Jon Bouton about the process to obtain an amphibian trapping permit and convey the information to Chris so Chris can obtain the permit for the annual salamander walk.

**21. HCC Member Terms:** Chris Beetham, (8/7/27) Sky Claud, (7/31/27) Mike Harris, (8/7/27) Mary Hutchins, (10/30/27) Ted Levin, (11/15/25) vice-chair Katie Mann (3/20/27) and chair Tom Kahl (8/24/24).