

Approved Minutes of the
Hartford Conservation Commission
February 3, 2020

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

Staff Present: Planner Matt Osborn.

Others Present: Hartford resident Paul Blazeovich and Selectboard Liaison Alan Johnson.

A meeting of the Conservation Commission was held at the Hartford Town Hall located at 171 Bridge Street, White River Jct. on Monday, February 3, 2020. Tom Kahl called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

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 are any corrections to the Draft Minutes of January 6th. Being none, Tom stated that the minutes are approved as written by unanimous consent.
3. **Natural Resource Landowner Outreach:** Katie Mann reported that she has been working on the individual maps (using Biofinder) and letters to property owners for the second group of priority conservation parcels. She noted that there is a concentration of properties in the northeast quadrant of the town. She noted that there are a couple of parcels that have changed ownership, but is not sure of the new owners. Matt Osborn agreed to verify the current owners from the Listers database. Tom Kahl suggested placing all HCC members on the letters. The HCC agreed.
4. **Develop Integrated Town Forest Plan:** Tom Kahl reported that Angie Emerson began work on consolidating the several different plans/inventories for the Town Forest. Tom noted that Angie proposes the integrated plan to have four sections and the HCC agreed with this approach:
 1. History: To include history from the 1998 Forest Management Plan and the 2002 Recreation Management Plan and updates since 2002.
 2. Forest Integrity: To include inventories and habitat assessments, vernal pool map and the wetlands agreement with the Maxfield Sports Complex.
 3. Timber and Forest Resource Management: To include the Forest Management Plans (1998, 2011 & current update)
 4. Recreation: To include the 2002 Recreation Management Plan and the 2018 Recreation Plan (pilot project with consultant SE Group). This will be the first section to be developed and Angie has previously circulated some conceptual drafts for comment. Because of meeting time limitations this discussion was postponed to the March meeting.

Tom thanked Angie for spearheading the effort.

5. **HCC 2020 Work Program:** Tom Kahl noted that the HCC reviewed the Work Program last month. He noted that Jon Bouton met with Angie Emerson and are recommending adding a third item under education (Town Forest ecology) and include vernal pool education and Trails and Forest ecology. Jon stated that there is an ongoing need to inform the public about forest ecology. The HCC agreed. Jon noted that he attended a workshop on the impact of trails on wildlife and would like to bring a speaker on the subject to the Upper Valley and possible co-sponsor with other organizations. The HCC agreed. Jon agreed to follow-up. The following is the HCC list of priorities:

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.
4. Invasive plant mitigation on Town conservation land.

Recreation:

1. Town Forest Trails Work including trails map updates and trail work days.
2. Contract with the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps for trails work in the Town Forest

Education:

1. HCC sponsored events (snowshoe outing, vernal pool walk & invasive plant outing)
2. Participate in the Hartford Community Coalition Block Party
3. Town Forest Ecology (vernal pools and trails and forest ecology)

6. Town Forest:

- a. Forest Management: Jon Bouton reported that A.J. Follensbee has completed field work for the Forest Management Plan update. Matt Osborn reported that the item has been tentatively scheduled for the February 25th Selectboard meeting. However, Lori Hirshfield suggested waiting until after Town Meeting and the Selectboard election so any new Selectboard members would be in attendance. The HCC agreed. Matt will request getting on the Selectboard agenda in March. Lee Michaelides will finalize the forest management plan update write-up.
- b. Game of Logging: Tom Kahl noted that at the January meeting the HCC approved the request by the Hartford Area Career Technology Center (HACTC) Adult Education Program to host a chainsaw education class this spring (Level One Game of Logging class). Jon Bouton offered to support the use of the Town Forest for Level Two Game of Logging as well. The HACTC responded favorably. Jon noted that no additional trees will need to be cut and the trees cut in Level One will be cut in Level Two. The Game of Logging will take place on May 2nd and 3rd for Levels One and Two respectively. Jon Bouton made a motion to allow the Level Two Game of Logging class to be held this spring in the Town Forest. The motion was seconded by Dana Hazen and approved. Jon volunteered to inform Charles Reibel of the HACTC that the HCC approved having the Level Two course in the HTF. Jon will also mark the 12-15 trees to be cut and coordinate their locations with the HACTC.
- c. Trails Committee: Tom Kahl reported that the Trails Committee met on January 30th to discuss the work plan for 2020. The Committee came up with the following list of projects:
 1. **Pine Drop Trail** (south of 58) – This item was given the UVTA’s highest priority rating and is both an erosion and mountain bike safety problem. The VYCC will be working on this section.
 2. **The Goat** (29-9) – A popular MB trail that needs a complicated tree removal and tread work. This is the VYCC’s second priority for their July work. The VYCC will be working on this section if time permits.
 3. **Simonds Way** – There is an approximately 20-30 ft long trail wet uphill from ITM 51 and several smaller spots between ITM 50 and the Pine Drop Trail. The VYCC will be working on this section if time permits.
 4. **Moose Brook Trail** – Two spring 2020 work-day projects.

5. **Jill's Trail** (between 13 to 27B) – There is a long (40-50 ft) section of this single-track trail that surface water drains through and is very muddy. 2020 work-day projects.
6. **West Side Trail** (about 50-100 ft west of ITM 11 at Reservoir Road) – This is a large trail wet area that is exacerbated by unauthorized vehicular traffic coming from Reservoir Road. 2020 work-day projects.

Tom Kahl noted that the mountain bikers flagged a re-route. In April, Jenn Seredejko of VYCC will look at re-route options and include the mountain biking community in the discussion.

Jon Bouton expressed about the re-routing of Pine Drop. He suggested that the re-route not encroach on the unfragmented forest area of the Town Forest and Hurricane Forest Wildlife Refuge to ensure wildlife have an area free of trails. Jon also thinks the HCC should look at other trails as well before undertaking improvements. Angie Emerson responded that there is a lot of work that needs to be done and that the HCC has time to take a close look at the trails.

- d. **Trails Grant Application:** Tom Kahl reported that the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association (UVMBA) is willing to submit a grant application to the Vermont Mountain Bike Association (VMBA) for materials and tools in conjunction with the above trail improvements planned for 2020. The grant is funded through the Vermont Country Store and the maximum grant award is \$5,000. The Trails Committee came up with an itemized list including a battery-powered chainsaw. Matt Osborn stated that he is working on the grant application and will submit to the UVMBA. Matt expressed concern about ownership and use of a chainsaw and will investigate options before submitting the application.
 - e. **Snowshoe Outing:** Jon Bouton noted that the annual snowshoe at the Town Forest will take place on Sunday, February 16th from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Jon reported that County Forester A.J. Follensbee will be attending. Matt Osborn volunteered to create a flyer, post on the town website and on the Valley News Calendar. Jon will prepare a description and post on the Hartford List Serve.
 - f. **VYCC Work Crew:** Tom Kahl reported that VYCC will visit the Town Forest in April to flag the Pine Drop relocation and that the VYCC agreed to get input from the mountain bike community.
7. **Bird Outreach:** Mary Hutchins reported that she left messages with the Vermont Center for Ecostudies about a program to reach out to property owners of grasslands to improve bird habitat, but has not heard back from them. Katie Mann volunteered to follow-up on it.
 8. **Quechee Lakes Land:** Tom Kahl reported that he heard from Bob Linck of the Vermont Land Trust about the Quechee Lakes Corporation (Taurus Investment Holdings) 640-acre property for sale and the possibility of a conservation easement. He asked about the importance of this parcel to the Town of Hartford. Tom Kahl will compose a draft description of the natural resource value of this parcel to Hartford and circulate to the HCC for review and comment.
 9. **David Change Conservation Area:** Jon Bouton presented several design options that Mary Hutchins developed for perimeter signage. The HCC selected a design. Jon will obtain a price quote for the signs. Dana Hazen will contact Botanist Bob Popp of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department to obtain recommendations for the rare plants on the property. This will guide the plan for invasive plant control.
 10. **HCC Town Meeting Informational Table:** The HCC agreed to coordinate with the Hartford's Energy Committee request to highlight "Climate Emergency" as the theme for the HCC's table at the

February 29, 2020 Town Meeting Coffee with Committees. Jon Bouton agreed to coordinate the HCC's table and Angie Emerson said that she will also be at the HCC table.

11. Passing Land Pop-Up Session: Jon Bouton reported that the Coverts are not able to offer a Passing Land Pop-Up Session in Hartford in 2020, but they are having one in March in Brattleboro. Tom Kahl will pass this information to the three local residents who in December expressed interest in a local session.

12. Future HCC Events:

- February 16, 2020 HTF Snowshoe and Ecology Hike
- April 18, 2020 Vernal Pool Visit
- May 9, 2020 Spring HTF Trail Work Day
- September 12, 2020 Fall HTF Trail Work Day

13. Next Meeting: Tom Kahl noted that the next HCC meeting is scheduled for Monday, March 2nd.

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

15. Meeting Action Items:

- a) Matt Osborn agreed to verify the current owners for the natural resource letters from the Listers database.
- b) Jon Bouton agreed to investigate bringing a speaker to Hartford on the impact of trails on wildlife and seek a co-sponsor.
- c) Matt Osborn agreed to request getting on a Selectboard Meeting agenda in March to discuss forest management and timber harvesting.
- d) Lee Michaelides will update the HTF Forest Management Plan Update Summary to the latest comments.
- e) Jon Bouton volunteered to let the HACTC know that the HCC approved the Game of Logging Level Two in the HTF and that he will mark the 12-15 trees in the Town Forest to be cut for the Game of Logging.
- f) Matt Osborn stated that he will complete the draft trails grant application and submit to the Vermont Mountain Bike Association through the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association.
- g) Matt Osborn will investigate chainsaw ownership and use options before submitting the trails grant application.
- h) The HCC will coordinate with VYCC and mountain bikers regarding the re-route options for Pine Drop Trail.
- i) Matt Osborn volunteered to create a flyer for the 2/16 Town Forest snowshoe event, post on the town website and the Valley News Calendar. Jon Bouton will prepare a description and post on the Hartford List Serve.
- j) Katie Mann volunteered to follow-up with the Vermont Center for Ecostudies on the bird outreach initiative.
- k) Jon Bouton will obtain a price quote for the David Chang Conservation Area signs.
- l) Dana Hazen will contact Botanist Bob Popp of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department to obtain recommendations for the rare plants on the David Chang Conservation Area.
- m) Jon Bouton will lead the preparation of a "Climate Emergency" theme for the HCC's February 29, 2020 Town Meeting Coffee with Commissions table.
- n) Tom Kahl will pass information on the Coverts 2020 Passing Land Pop Up Sessions to the three local residents who in December expressed interest in a local session.
- o) Tom Kahl will compose a draft description of the natural resource value of the Quechee Lakes 5C parcel to Hartford and circulate to the HCC for review and comment.
- p) The HCC agreed to purchase a few Linking Lands Alliance maps that Jon Bouton will select.