

Approved Minutes of the
Hartford Conservation Commission
February 6, 2023

Members Present & Date their Term is Up: Jon Bouton (9/7/24), Angie Emerson (1/11/25), Mary Hutchins (11/4/23), Ted Levin (11/15/25), Katie Mann (2/26/23), Lee Michaelides (10/29/26) and chair Tom Kahl (8/24/24).

Staff Present: Town Planner Matt Osborn.

Others Present: Janelle Sahutski and Selectboard Liaison Mary Erdei.

A hybrid Hartford Conservation Commission (HCC) Meeting in compliance of the Open Meeting Law was held on Monday, February 6th 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. **Changes to the Agenda:** Tom asked if there are any changes to the agenda. There were none.
2. **Approval of Minutes:** Tom asked if there are any changes to the draft minutes of 1/9/23. There were none. Tom stated that the HCC minutes of 1/9/23 are approved as written by unanimous consent.
3. **Public Comments:** Tom asked if there are any public comments. There were none.
4. **Wilder School Project:** Lee Michaelides reported that Carolyn Hooper, a member of the Climate Action Steering Team and Resilient Hartford, is working on an effort to develop a food forest at the Wilder School. She is working closely with principal Doug Heavisides. Lee noted that the School is planning on selecting plant species that support their educational mission. He added that there is school support and enthusiasm for the project. They are currently planning to install playground equipment this summer. Lee will contact Carolyn to confirm if she wants to speak with the HCC at our March 6, 2023 meeting.
5. **Climate Action Plan:** Lee reported that the Town grant application to treat invasive plants and plant trees at Lyman Point Park received approval. Angie noted that the project is an opportunity for education about riparian buffers and invasive plant species. Leading this educational effort could be part of HCC's contribution to this project and Lee and Angie agreed to work with the Tree Board and develop a public education program for this project. Lee suggested working with Junction Arts and Media (JAM) to create a video. The HCC agreed. Lee agreed to reach out to JAM.
6. **Town Forest Timber Harvest Update:** Matt reported that Long View completed harvesting trees and hauling them out of the forest to the two log landings. The harvester was removed from the site and the forwarder is schedule to leave shortly. Most logs were removed from the south log landing and there is a large pile of logs at the north log landing. Long View expects to remove all of the logs from the landings by the end of the week. Clean-up of the site will not occur until the spring when the site dries out.

Matt reported that he received emails from two neighbors who are concerned about ensuring that recreationists don't park at the north log landing after the logs are hauled away. Matt stated that the plan is to peel back the gravel that was placed along Reservoir Road and make a ditch and berm along the road. The landing will be seeded and mulched as well. This will not happen until the spring. Matt and Tom think that to be responsive to the neighbor's concerns something needs to be done until spring. Tom Kahl suggested setting up intermittent sawhorses with no parking signs connected by ropes. Matt agreed to discuss with the Department of Public Works.

Matt reported that he talked to Hartford Area Career Technology Center Natural Resources Teacher Matt Dragon about clean-up of the cut areas and recreation trails. Matt O. noted that Matt D. expressed concern about not overcommitting and waiting to see the HACTC late winter/spring work schedule. Matt O. agreed to talk to A.J. Follensbee about coordinating the work with the HACTC.

Katie Mann had spoken to Anna Schaal about Anna offering her assistance to the HACTC about trail standards. The HCC agreed that it was a good idea. Katie agreed to get back to Anna to coordinate Anna's input to AJ and the HACTC.

7. **HACTC T-Shirt Fund Donation:** Matt reported that the Town can't make donations. He talked to teacher Matt Dragon and asked him to look at alternatives. Matt O. is waiting to hear back from Matt D. Matt noted that any alternative must be approved by the Planning and Finance Director.
8. **Town Forest Timber Harvest Public Outreach:** Tom asked Mary Hutchins if Richard Wright will host a sawmill demonstration this spring? Mary responded yes but it would not likely occur until late spring.
9. **Trailforks:** Tom asked if the trails that were closed due to the timber harvest should remain closed until clean-up can be done in the spring. The HCC agreed to keep the trails closed and to post it on Trailforks. Jon Bouton suggested changing the signs in the Town Forest to reflect that. The HCC agreed. It was also suggested that once the announcement that the timber harvest is complete to include a link to the timber harvest map that shows the closed trails. Matt agreed to post on the Hartford List Serv and the Town website. Katie agreed to post on the Upper Valley List Serv.
10. **Town Forest Kiosk Sign Replacement:** Matt noted that the existing sign takes up a lot of space and the HCC wants to create more space for educational materials and notices. Matt added that the current sign states "Hurricane Town Forest" and we are trying to differentiate the Town Forest from the "Hurricane Forest Wildlife Refuge". He suggested being consistent and changing it to "Hartford Town Forest". The HCC agreed. Mary Hutchins volunteered to design the sign.
11. **Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association Annual Meeting:** Katie reported that she attended the January 25, 2023 annual meeting of the UVMBA. About 50 people attended. She thought it was a good meeting and that UVMBA and the HCC have a lot in common. Katie noted that UVMBA promoted the MOU with the Town. UVMBA is currently going through a master planning process. Tom thanked Katie for attending. Katie suggested that an HCC representative attend the meeting every year.

While at the meeting, Katie was approached by a mountain bike teacher who is interested in teaching a mountain bike class in the Town Forest. She asked the Commission what they think about it. Ted stated that they should do the class after birds have fledged. Jon suggested imposing some restrictions. Mary Hutchins thought it will bring too many people to the Town Forest. Lee noted that spring can be wet and suggested a fall class. There was consensus to consider it.
12. **Forest Interpretive Signs:** Jon reported that he is working on it.
13. **Private Landowner Conservation Outreach:** Matt reported that he will complete the mailing to seven property owners this week.
14. **Book "Our Better Nature":** Ted reported that he read the book "Our Better Nature: Hopeful Excursions in Saving Biodiversity". He stated that it is an excellent book that should be provided to

Hartford libraries and schools. Matt will inquire about the cost of the books and report back to the HCC at next month's meeting.

15. **HCC Website and Posting of the Integrated Town Forest Plan:** Matt reported that the Integrated Town Forest Management Plan and attachment were posted on the HCC webpage last week. Regarding other changes to the HCC webpage, Matt stated that we need to wait until Town website changes are made. Lee asked if a link to Trails Fork could be added to the current Town Forest trails map. Katie responded that she could do it if she had the map file. Matt said that he will see if he has a copy of the map's GIS and data file to provide Katie, and if not Tom said that he could provide the files.
16. **HCC Conservation Award:** Matt reported that he will seek permission to erect the award plaque in the Town Hall. Tom asked if the award should be annual or as determined by the HCC. The consensus was that it be awarded as determined by the HCC.
17. **HCC Opening:** Angie Emerson reported that she has put her Wilder home for sale and will be moving to North Carolina. Tom thanked Angie for her valuable service to the HCC. Angie stated that she has enjoyed the experience and learned a lot about conservation. Matt agreed to advertise the opening.
18. **Announcements:**
 - a. Town Forest Natural History Walk: Ted Levin reported that there were 25-30 people who attended the Natural History Walk in the Town Forest. Mary Erdei commented that it was a nice event.
 - b. Spring Educational Events: Tom asked about the annual Vernal Pool Walk. It was agreed to coordinate with the Hartford Salamander Team. Angie volunteered and will copy Katie who will follow-up after Angie leaves. Ted reported that he will lead a bird walk in the Town Forest on Saturday, May 20th.
19. **Next Meeting:** Tom reported that the next HCC meeting is scheduled for Monday, March 6th at 7:00 p.m.
20. **Adjournment:** Angie made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Ted and approved. The meeting was adjourned at 8:44 p.m.
21. **Meeting Action Items:**
 - a. Lee will contact Carolyn Hooper to see if she wants to discuss the Wilder School Food Forest project at the HCC's March 6, 2023 meeting.
 - b. Lee and Angie agreed to develop a public educational program for improving the Lyman Point Park riparian buffer, and Lee to reach out to JAM.
 - c. Matt agreed to discuss with the Department of Public Works ways to prevent parking on the North Log Landing on Reservoir Road following completion of the timber harvest.
 - d. Matt agreed to talk to A.J. Follensbee about coordinating Town Forest clean-up work with the HACTC.
 - e. Katie agreed to get back to Anna Schaal about talking about trail standards to the HACTC.
 - f. Matt agreed to post a link to the closed trail map on the Hartford List Serv and the Town website.
 - g. Katie agreed to post a link to the closed trail map on the Upper Valley List Serv.
 - h. Mary Hutchins volunteered to design a smaller new sign for the Town Forest Kiosk.
 - i. Matt reported that he will complete the Natural Resources mailing.
 - j. Katie responded that she will add a link to Trailsfork to the Town Forest Trails Map after Matt provides the base GIS and data files.

- k. Matt will inquire about providing the Hartford Area Career Technology Center with some compensation for their t-shirt fund for the work they completed in the Town Forest.
- l. Matt will work on obtaining permission to install a Conservation Commission Awards Plaque in the Town Hall.
- m. Matt agreed to advertise the HCC opening.
- n. Angie volunteered to contact the Hartford Salamander Team about the April vernal pool walk.
- o. Matt will inquire about the cost to provide the book “Our Better Nature: Hopeful Excursions in Saving Biodiversity” to Hartford libraries and schools and report back to the HCC at next month’s meeting.