

Approved Minutes of the
Hartford Conservation Commission
March 1, 2021

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

Staff Present: Planner Matt Osborn.

Others Present: None.

A remote meeting of the Conservation Commission in compliance with the Vermont Open Meeting Law was held on Monday, March 1, 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 suggested adding the Hartford Salamander Team, the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions Tiny Grant and the Open Space Institute Grant to the agenda. He asked if there are any other changes or additions to the agenda. There were none.
2. **Approval of Minutes:** Tom Kahl He asked if there were any changes to the minutes of February 1, 2021 HCC Meeting. There were no changes. Tom stated that the minutes are approved as written by unanimous consent.
3. **Town Forest Recreation Management Plan:** Matt Osborn reported that we received comments from two property owners; one abutting the Town Forest and the other abutting the Hurricane Forest Wildlife Refuge regarding the Recreation Management Plan. David L. and Marjorie Brown of Bliss Road, who abut the Town Forest, expressed concern about ATV's in the Town Forest and them potentially going onto their property. Tom Kahl noted that the ATV trails do not go near David and Marjorie's property. He suggested that a no ATV sign be posted at the bottom of the VAST Trail at the intersection with Reservoir Road. The HCC agreed. The Browns also expressed concern about allowing swimming and ice skating in the Town Forest ponds. Tom responded that the current plan does not mention swimming or ice skating. While we don't want to encourage these activities by listing them as permitted, swimming and ice skating will not adversely affect the HTF environment or other users. Therefore, he suggests that we let HTF users decide for themselves if they want to swim or ice skate at the Town Forest ponds. The HCC agreed. Tom agreed to respond to the Browns.

David Brown of Remick Road, who abuts the Hurricane Forest Wildlife Refuge, expressed his opposition to e-bikes and mountain bikes in the Town Forest since he believes they cause erosion. The HCC agreed that if properly managed, mountain bike use shouldn't result in erosion problems and should be allowed to continue. In addition, trail conditions are being monitored. As for e-bikes, the HCC is recommending a one-year trial period.

Tom asked Matt when the Recreation Management Plan could get on the Selectboard agenda? Matt responded that it will likely be in April and he will inquire with the Town Manager's office.

4. **Compilation of Town Forest Management Plans:** Angie Emerson reported that she has been working on a compilation/summary of the different management plans for the Town Forest. She thinks it is important for residents and new commission members to be aware of the history of management in the Town Forest and be able to read a summary. It is also important to tie the different plans together. Jon Bouton thanked Angie for taking the lead on the compilation. He volunteered to work with Angie on the compilation.

5. Private Landowner Outreach: Tom Kahl reported that he has drafted a follow-up letter to property owners of the two previous groups of ten property owners about forest management in the Town Forest. Jon Bouton responded that it is a good idea. The HCC agreed. Tom agreed to send the letters and asked for any HCC comments by March 8th. The HCC agreed to talk about the next ten natural resource properties at the April 5th HCC meeting to allow Katie Mann to participate.

6. Town Forest:

- a. Winter 2022 Timber Harvest: Tom Kahl reported that County Forester A.J. Follensbee has been busy putting together forest management videos. A short six-minute video explaining the 2022 timber harvest has been posted on the HCC webpage.

Regarding use of some of the wood from the timber harvest, Cover Home Repair could use 1,200 board feet of hemlock for ramp construction projects in Hartford. The HCC also agreed to use hemlock from the timber harvest for bridge construction in the Town Forest instead of pressure treated lumber. The HCC did not propose any other community uses for wood harvested from the Town Forest.

- b. Hartford Area Career Technology Center Natural Resources Class: Tom Kahl reported that A.J. will work inquire with Tom Ostler's Natural Resources class about their participation in the 2022 timber harvest.
- c. 2021 Trail Maintenance: Tom Kahl reported that the Trails Committee will meet in April on site to look at work projects planned for the May trails work outing.

Regarding the issue of leaf blowing of the mountain bike trails, it was agreed to continue looking into a possible grant to investigate the impact since there is not conclusive evidence on the topic. Lee Michaelides noted that in the Boston Lot in Lebanon, they leaf blow in the spring, but not in the fall. He also noted that new mountain bike trails in the Green Mountain National Forest in Rochester were constructed and it would be good to know if leaf blowing is allowed.

- d. Wayfinding Signs. Matt Osborn will discuss the challenges and options with the Department of Public Works in the coming weeks.
- e. Trails Map & Signs: Tom Kahl reported that he will talk to Tim Schaal about the 11" 17" trail maps for the Town Forest. Tom recommends holding off on the signs until the updated Recreation Plan is adopted by the Selectboard. The HCC agreed.
- f. Hartford High School Outreach: Jon Bouton reported that he made contact with a teacher at the school district about a possible project such as a pollinator garden, interpretive signage, or trail maintenance. Jon agreed to follow-up.
- g. Possible Conservation Easement: Tom Kahl noted that Matt Osborn sent out information on conservation easements and the conservation easement on the Maanawaka Conservation Area. Tom asked the HCC if they are interested in pursuing a conservation easement for the Town Forest. The HCC agreed. Dana Hazen suggested looking into using the conservation easement as leverage for grant money as opposed to a straight donation since it is different from a standard conservation easement where there is a tax deduction. It was agreed to invite a representative from the Upper Valley Land Trust to attend a future HCC meeting to talk about conservation easements. Matt volunteered to contact the Upper Valley Land Trust.

7. **Climate Action Plan Report:** Mary Hutchins reported that workshops for the Climate Action Plan (CAP) continue. One is scheduled for Wednesday, March 3rd.
8. **Maanawaka Conservation Area Power Line Treatment:** Matt Osborn responded that the Town was contacted by Arborist Scott Carlson of the Vermont Electric Power Company about vegetation treatment of the power line that crosses the Maanawaka Conservation Area. They will be using selective herbicide application to target trees that will grow and eventually interfere with the power lines. Treatment takes place every four years. Dana Hazen responded that what they are proposing seems reasonable. Jon Bouton agreed and noted that they treat invasive plants and protect ground cover. Tom Kahl summarized that the HCC had no objections.

9. Announcements:

- a. Hartford Salamander Team: Tom Kahl reported that the Hartford Salamander Team (HST) is gearing up for the spring amphibian migration. The HST is participating in the Amphibian Road Crossing (ARC) Program and has generated a dozen or so volunteers from Hartford. The group has identified twenty potential and confirmed amphibian road crossings in Hartford. He noted that the Hartford Salamander Team is working with the North Branch Nature Center (NBNC) in Montpelier on the ARC Program. NBNC does training and data analysis for the ARC Program. Tom noted that the ARC Program goals are: (1) Increase public engagement in amphibian conservation. (2) Decrease direct amphibian mortality at road crossing sites. (3) Inform local and state transportation planning with robust data on movement and mortality at road crossings.

According to an email from Ben Lay of the HST, “our team is organized to contribute data to their research project, and we have so far benefited from the guidance of the wonderful North Branch Nature Center staff, particularly Zac Cota-Weaver who oversees the ARC data and facilitates trainings for new volunteers (one of which we hope to organize for the month of March). North Branch has a developed procedure for partnering with town Conservation Commissions and supporting their involvement with ARC, and to put it succinctly, the Hartford Salamander Team would like our town to sign up.”

The Hartford Salamander Team has requested that the HCC assist with partnering with the North Branch Nature Center on the ARC program, and the cost for assistance such as training and data analysis would be in the \$200-\$300 range. Tom stated that this is a volunteer grass-roots conservation effort and his opinion is that the HCC should support them. The HCC agreed. Angie Emerson made a motion to apply for an AVCC grant (see c. below), but if that is unsuccessful to use HCC budget funds. The motion was seconded by Mary Hutchins and unanimously approved.

- b. Open Space Institute Grant: Tom Kahl reported that a national conservation group (Open Space Institute) has set up an \$18 million fund to conserve forest in New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine, among other states, as a way to fight climate change and to protect wildlife. Tom suggested that Matt ask the Upper Valley Land Trust about the potential to use funds in Hartford. Matt agreed.
- c. Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions Tiny Grant Program: Tom Kahl reported that the annual AVCC Tiny Grant Program was announced. The deadline for applications is May 1st. Matt agreed to prepare an application for a \$200-\$300 grant for Hartford to partner with the North Branch Nature Center on their ARC program.

10. **Next Meeting:** Tom Kahl reported that the next HCC meeting is scheduled for Monday, April 5th at 7:00 p.m.

11. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:44 p.m.

12. Meeting Action Items:

- a) Tom will respond to David L and Marjorie Brown about their comments on the proposed updated Town Forest Recreational Plan.
- b) Matt agreed to work with the Town Manager's office to schedule the Recreation Management Plan on the Selectboard agenda.
- c) Jon volunteered to work with Angie on the compilation of Town Forest management plans.
- d) The Trails Committee will meet in April on site to look at work projects planned for the May trails work outing.
- e) The HCC agreed to continue looking into a possible grant to investigate the impact of leaf blowing on trail erosion.
- f) Tom Kahl reported that he will talk to Tim Schaal about the 11" 17" trail maps for the Town Forest.
- g) Matt will work with the Department of Public Works to plan the installation of wayfinding signs directing people to the Town Forest.
- h) Tom agreed to send a separate letter to the two previous groups of ten property owners about the 2022 timber harvest.
- i) It was agreed to look at the list of the next (third) ten or so of the highest ranked natural resource parcels and discuss at the next meeting which property owners to include in the next mailing.
- j) Jon agreed to follow-up about a possible student project in the Town Forest.
- k) Matt agreed to invite a representative from the Upper Valley Land Trust to attend a future HCC meeting to talk about conservation easements and the Town Forest.
- l) Matt agreed to ask the Upper Valley Land Trust about the potential to use Open Space Institute grant funds in Hartford.
- m) Matt agreed to prepare a AVCC Tiny Grant application for Hartford to partner with the North Branch Nature Center on 2021 amphibian protection.