

Approved Minutes of the
Hartford Conservation Commission
March 6, 2023

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

Staff Present: Town Planner Matt Osborn.

Others Present: Carolyn Hooper.

A hybrid Hartford Conservation Commission (HCC) Meeting in compliance of the Open Meeting Law was held on Monday, March 6th in Room 312 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 2/6/23. There were none. Tom stated that the HCC minutes of 2/6/23 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:** Carolyn Hooper, a member of the Climate Action Steering Team and Resilient Hartford was present to discuss an effort to develop a low maintenance food forest at the Wilder School (School). She noted that a number of trees have been lost and the site has a large expanse of lawn. Carolyn is working closely with principal Doug Heavisides. The idea is to bring nature to the students. She added that there is school support and enthusiasm for the project. She noted that the School is planning on selecting plant species that support their educational mission. They are currently looking at developing a plant list and simple designs. The School is currently planning to install playground equipment this spring or summer and that work on the food forest would follow. Carolyn is seeking interest in collaborating with the HCC and other groups. Katie Mann volunteered to be the HCC liaison on the project. Katie also noted that Vital Communities has a gardening grant. Ted Levin noted the Wellborn Ecology Fund is another funding source. Jon Bouton suggested the Vermont Community Forestry Program. Carolyn noted that she will be meeting with the Tree Board.
5. **Town Forest Timber Harvest Update:** Matt reported that all logs were removed from both log landings and checks from the timber harvest are still coming in. Gross receipts to date have exceeded \$13,000 while expenses are currently about \$2,000. Jon noted that it was financially beneficial to the Town not to have a lump sum bid. Matt noted that the Hartford Area Career and Technology Center worked on clean-up last week practicing chain saw work cutting stumps. They will continue to do clean-up work as time allows. Long View will return in the spring to clean-up of the site once the site dries out. Matt noted that the trails in the logged area will remain closed until the clean-up is finished. Katie noted that the HCC has to make sure that rogue trails don't emerge from the logging work. The HCC agreed.

Matt reported that he received a complaint from a Selectboard member about the number of cut trees that were left on the ground from the timber harvest and the mess created by the timber harvest. Matt consulted with Forester AJ Follensbee and AJ responded that the logs left were unsalable due to defects like rot, knots or seep. There was also a restriction in the contract that wood from this treatment could not be sold to mills that produce energy through burning wood chips. This would be the only market for the softwood pulp (softwood logs that could not be sold for lumber) cut within the

treatment area. The logger took all the logs they could sell. A.J. noted that it is not in the Logger's interest to leave logs in the forest that they could sell. Matt noted that a site visit with the Selectboard member, A.J., and himself will take place in the spring when the snow has melted. Jon expressed an interest in attending.

Matt reported that he hasn't received any complaints from neighbors about parking next to the North Landing since we've received a lot of snow.

6. **HACTC T-Shirt Fund Donation:** Matt reported that since the Town can't make donations, he talked to teacher Matt Dragon about purchasing t-shirts or other equipment items directly. Matt noted that any alternative must be approved by the Planning and Finance Director.
7. **Town Forest Kiosk Sign Replacement:** Matt reported that Mary Hutchins had come up with a sign design. There was discussion and consensus that the sign dimensions be reduced from 72" x 18" wide to 36" x 12" high to create more space for other information. The current sign is metal. Mary suggested a vinyl sign since it is less expensive and will be protected from the elements. The HCC agreed. Mary will get a price quote from a sign company in Barre that she uses for snow machine signs. Tom thanked Mary for developing the sign design and getting a quote. Matt agreed to get Katie the G.I.S. files for the trails map.
8. **Forest Interpretive Signs:** Jon reported that he is working on it. He suggests placing three or so signs in different places to explain the management goal of the work. Tom suggested an annual photo progression at several same locations to show how the forest changes over time. The HCC liked the suggestion.
9. **Private Landowner Conservation Outreach:** Matt reported that he completed the mailing to the property owners and that he hasn't received any responses. There was discussion about whether to pursue letters to additional property owners. Tom responded that we should discontinue the letter campaign since we have received very little response. The HCC agreed. Jon suggested sending out a brief follow-up letter to all of the property owners sent letters in the past (approximately 35). Katie volunteered to draft the letter.
10. **Book "Our Better Nature":** Matt reported that he inquired about purchasing ten copies of the book "Our Better Nature: Hopeful Excursions in Saving Biodiversity" for the four Town libraries and each of the six Town schools. He stated that we could get a 20% discount. He asked the HCC if they wanted to make the purchase. Ted made a motion to purchase the ten books using HCC funds. The motion was seconded by Mary and approved 5 to 0. Matt will seek approval for the request and if approved, place the order for the books.
11. **HCC Conservation Award/Plaque:** Matt reported that he spoke to Department of Planning and Development Director Lori Hirshfield and she requested a write-up of the proposal. The HCC agreed that Lee Michaelides would be perfect for the task and will ask him to draft the proposal.
12. **Annual AVCC Grant Application:** Tom reported that the annual grant application is due in the coming weeks. He asked if the HCC should apply. There was consensus that we should be thinking of a grant for a specific project rather than a project for a specific grant. Matt requested discussing further in advance of a grant application since the Town has an approval process to submit a grant application. The HCC agreed.

- 13. Vermont Wetlands Organization:** Tom reported that a new non-profit wetlands organization the Vermont Association of Wetlands Science was recently formed and will be offering educational opportunities.
- 14. Vermont Invasive Management Day:** Tom reported that we received an email request from a Jericho, Vermont resident requesting a letter of support for his effort to ask the State Legislature to declare a Vermont Invasive Management Day. Ted looked into it and felt they lacked a clear definition of invasive plants. There was discussion and consensus that the effort needs to provide more details for the HCC to support.
- 15. HCC Opening:** Tom reported that Angie has a closing date on the sale of her home in Wilder later this month and will be moving to North Carolina. Tom noted that we should seek a new member. Katie volunteered to put together a posting on the Hartford List Serv. Tom passed around a card for Angie. Jon brought in a hermit thrush ornament as a gift from the HCC to Angie. The hermit thrush is the Vermont state bird.
- 16. Vernal Pool Walk:** Jon will be unable to lead this annual event. Katie volunteered to contact Steve Faccio and Kevin Tolan from the Vermont Center for Ecostudies to see if they would be technical leads for this event. Jon has minnow traps and the permit that can be used capture and release salamanders.
- 17. Announcements:**
- Hartford Salamander Team Training: Monday, March 13th.
 - Town Meeting Coffee with Committees: Tom reported that he and Angie attended the annual Coffee with Committees portion at the March 4th Town Meeting and had a Conservation Commission display. There was a very small turnout.
- 17. Upcoming Events:** Tom reported on the following events:
- Vernal Pool Walk: Saturday, April 22nd.
 - Green-Up Day: Saturday, May 6th.
 - Bird Walk Town Forest: Saturday, May 20th.
- 19. Next HCC Meeting:** Tom reported that the next meeting is scheduled for Monday, April 3rd 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 8:38 p.m.
- 21. Meeting Action Items:**
- Katie Mann volunteered to be the HCC liaison on the Wilder School food forest project
 - Matt noted that a site visit to look at the timber harvest with Selectboard member Lannie Collins, A.J., and himself will take place in the spring when the snow has melted. Jon expressed an interest in attending.
 - Mary will get a price quote for the Town Forest Kiosk sign.
 - Matt agreed to get Katie the G.I.S. files for the trails map.
 - Katie volunteered to draft the letter to the property owners who were sent natural resource letters over the past few years.

- f. 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.
- g. Matt will seek approval for the request to purchase ten copies of the book “Our Better Nature: Hopeful Excursions in Saving Biodiversity” for Hartford libraries and schools and if approved, place the order for the books.
- h. The HCC agreed to ask Lee to write-up a proposal for the HCC Conservation Award. Once completed, Matt will work on obtaining Town approval to install a Conservation Commission Awards Plaque in the Town Hall.
- i. Katie volunteered to draft a posting of the HCC opening for the Hartford List Serv.
- j. Katie volunteered to contact Steve Faccio and Kevin Tolan from the Vermont Center for Ecostudies to see if they would be technical leads for an April Vernal Pool Walk.