

Approved Minutes of the
Hartford Conservation Commission
June 1, 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 and Planning Commission member Dennis Brown and HCC Selectboard Liaison Alan Johnson.

A remote meeting of the Conservation Commission in compliance with the Vermont Open Meeting Law was held on Monday, June 1, 2020. Tom Kahl called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. Tom read the Open Meeting Law Script developed by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns.

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 any changes to the minutes of May 4, 2020. There were no changes. Tom stated that the minutes are approved as written by unanimous consent.
3. **Green-Up Day:** Matt Osborn reported that even with the impact of COVID-19, Green-Up Day was successful. Both Quechee and Town Hall dumpsters were full and we had a good turnout on Green-Up Day even with slightly lower numbers of volunteers. Matt also noted that there were fewer tires this year. A big project this year was a group of volunteers that cleaned up a homeless encampment that resulted in several truckloads of trash and recyclables. Matt stated that he worked closely with Hartford Health Officer Brett Mayfield who provided masks for Green-Up Day and made a visit to the Town Hall on Green-Up Day. Matt reported that he brought gloves from his personal supply. He stated that without in-person registration, there is no way of knowing the total number of volunteers this year since many people picked up bags without registering. He added that roughly half of volunteers who registered did so on-line while the other half e-mailed or called Matt to register. Tom Kahl thanked Matt for adapting Hartford's Green-Up efforts to Covid-19. He also thanked Katie Mann for creating the on-line registration. Angela, Jon, Katie and Tom helped out on Green-Up Day.
4. **Forest Management Plan for Town Forest:** Jon Bouton reported that Matt Osborn and he attended the May 5th Selectboard Meeting to present the Forest Management Plan and discuss planned timber harvest. Jon thought the meeting went well and showed that the Conservation Commission needs to do continuous public education about forest management and why not just leave the forest alone.

Jon also reported that he has been in touch with County Forester A.J. Follensbee about the draft Forest Management Plan. Matt reported that Jon created text to explain why the Hurricane Forest Wildlife Refuge is no longer included in the Forest Management Plan. Matt has reviewed the Forest Management Plan and HCC comments and will review Jon's recent text and send all of the comments to A.J. Follensbee.

Tom Kahl wondered when we could hold an outdoor meeting with the public on the Forest Management Plan. Jon agreed to talk to A.J. about an outdoor meeting. As an alternative, Tom suggested offering the public a virtual tour.

Tom suggested making the Forest Management Plan "white paper" available to the public via the Hartford List Serv and a direct mailing to abutters. The HCC agreed. Matt will coordinate both items.

5. Natural Resource Landowner Outreach: Katie Mann reported that she is working on the maps for the final three letters to property owners. It was agreed to try to send these out soon. Once the maps are completed, Matt will mail the letters. It was also agreed to schedule a follow-up phone call with one property owner and schedule a site visit with another property owner. Jon Bouton volunteered.

6. Town Forest:

- a. Trails Committee: Tom Kahl noted that with some of the COVID-19 restrictions being lifted, he suggested implementing a trails work sign-up instead of a group work day. People can sign up for a trail section and do trail maintenance at their convenience. The HCC agreed. Katie Mann volunteered to create a google document for it. Tom credited Anna and Tim Schaal for the idea. It was suggested that tools from the Conservation Commission or the Upper Valley Trails Alliance could be borrowed for the trails work. Tom asked if there is a Town indoor location where the HCC tools could be stored. Matt Osborn responded that there is limited town storage space. He noted that HCC supplies were stored in the basement of the town hall. However, since the town hall is located in the 100-year flood zone, storage is not allowed. Matt noted that he spoke to Parks and Recreation Department Director Scott Hausler and the only Parks and Recreation Department space available was the barn at Clifford Park, nearly 8 miles from the town hall.
- b. VYCC Work Crew: Katie Mann reported that Tom Kahl, Matt Osborn, Bill Brown and Anna Schaal met with Jenn Seredejko of VYCC on May 22nd to view the re-route of the Pine Drop Trail that Jenn laid out and the alternative layout that Bill Brown flagged. The site visit lasted three-hours. Jenn shared a great deal of information on trail design. She also seemed to clearly understand the mountain biker perspective on what makes a trail enjoyable to ride. Bill and Anna expressed concern that the VYCC alignment appeared to be too steep and might not be used by many intermediate or beginner riders. They proposed a longer route that utilized a former woods road and appeared less steep. Jenn noted that using woods roads may look like they are less work. However, in the long run, they tend to require more maintenance. Jenn assured them that the grade of the VYCC alignment would meet International Mountain Bike Association standards. After the site visit, Tim and Anna requested additional time to discuss the alignment with other mountain bikers. They responded the following week that the VYCC alignment was fine. Katie added that Bill commented on the improved relationship between the Conservation Commission and the mountain biking community.

Tom Kahl noted that the VYCC work crew will consist of professional staff and not the normal youth crews. The work will be scheduled for the summer. Matt noted that he will work with VYCC to try to iron out an issue with the service agreement so that the agreement can be signed and the work scheduled.

- c. Trail Arrows: Tom Kahl reported that the 12 trail arrows that Matt Osborn ordered arrived. Tom painted the arrows and they are now available to be posted.
- d. Boundary Signs: Jon Bouton reported that Lee Michaelides and he repainted blazes along the Town Forest south and east boundaries. Matt Osborn provided Jon with the addresses of the adjoining property owners. Jon volunteered to contact the property owners about the re-blazing. Tom Kahl noted that “Leaving the Town Forest” signs are available if needed.
- e. Town Forest Invasive Plants: Katie Mann noted that she spotted Honeysuckle around the former Lower Hurricane Reservoir. Jon Bouton responded that the Conservation Commission should stay on top of it before it spreads. He suggested doing an inventory of invasive plants and a scope of work and releasing a Request for Proposals to hire a licensed contractor to treat invasive plants.

The HCC agreed. Jon volunteered to create a map of invasive plants. He noted that the Conservation Commission has used Town conservation funds to treat invasive plants before.

- f. Open Areas Around the Former Hurricane Reservoirs: Tom Kahl reported that vegetation is growing up around the former Hurricane Reservoirs and that the Forest Management Plan had recommended keeping the area free of woody vegetation. Tom noted that someone is mowing the area between the former Upper Hurricane Reservoir and Reservoir Road. He doesn't know who is doing the mowing and would like to thank them. Tom noted that Angie Emerson suggested a butterfly garden adjacent to the Upper Hurricane Reservoir and that the HCC should consider. Jon Bouton noted that there is little woody vegetation near the Lower Reservoir where the removed material from the dam was spread and because irregular shrubby vegetation has more wildlife value than annually-mowed grasses. He suggested allowing it to grow until it gets shrubby and sees no reason to mow that area this year.
 - g. Town Forest Recreation Plan: Matt Osborn reported that he edited the revised Recreation Management Plan prepared by the Conservation Commission Committee comprised of Jon Bouton, Lee Michaelides and Angie Emerson. He e-mailed the HCC the revised draft earlier this evening. Matt stated that he feels the introduction still needs some work and will take another look at it. Tom Kahl suggested that the HCC get comments back to Matt by next Monday. The HCC agreed. Tom asked Matt to set up a meeting with Planning Director Lori Hirshfield, Tom, Angie and Matt to discuss the changes to the Draft Recreation Management Plan and incorporating it in the SE Group Recreation Management Plan.
7. **David Chang Conservation Area**: Jon Bouton noted that he will get a quote on the boundary marker signs for the David Chang Conservation Area (DCCA). Dana Hazen reported that he will begin work on treating invasive plants in early July. Matt Osborn reported that he has not received word on whether we received the AVCC grant for herbicides to be used in the DCCA.
 8. **Stream Restoration Site Visit**: Katie Mann stated that she will inquire about scheduling a summer site visit.
 9. **Quechee Lakes Land Sale**: Matt Osborn reported that he e-mailed the letter and maps to the Vermont Land Trust with a description of the natural resource value of the Quechee Lakes Corporation (Taurus Investment Holdings) 640-acre property that is for sale. Tom Kahl requested that Matt send Bob Linck, VLT Central Vermont Regional Director a hard copy of the materials and make a hard copy for Tom as well.
 10. **Bird Outreach**: Matt Osborn reported that Mary Hutchins sent him the links to information on Bobolinks. Matt will have the links posted on the HCC webpage.
 11. **HCC Awards Plaque**: Matt Osborn reported that he will work on developing a design with a local sign maker and seek approval of the design and specific location for the plaque in the Town Hall. The award will be presented at the 2021 Hartford Community Coalition Block Party.
12. **Announcements**:
- a. Knotweed Control by Grazing: Jon Bouton reported that he was contacted by a Hartland Conservation Commission member about using cows to graze on Japanese Knotweed. Dana Hazen expressed concern that cows could cause erosion problems on steep terrain or riparian areas. Dana suggested a recent approach that has been successful that uses ½" mesh to control Knotweed. The HCC agreed to consider employing this practice.

- b. Knotweed in the Town Forest: Matt Osborn noted that there is a small section of Japanese Knotweed along Reservoir Road. He suggested dealing with it this summer before it spreads. The HCC agreed. Dana Hazen volunteered to look at it and recommend an approach to treat it.
- c. Game of Logging: Jon Bouton reported that he will work with Charlie Reibel of the Hartford Area Career Technology Center to mark the trees to be cut for the October 10th and 11th Game of Logging. Jon noted that the class will work in the area east of the trailhead parking area. Approximately 12 to 15 trees will be cut.

13. Next Meeting: Tom Kahl noted that the next HCC meeting is scheduled for Monday, July 6th. Tom suggested meeting outdoors at the Town Hall bandstand. Matt Osborn stated that he will inquire if it will be allowed by the Town.

14. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:48 p.m.

15. Meeting Action Items:

- a) Matt agreed to get HCC comments back to A.J. regarding on the draft Forest Management Plan.
- b) Matt agreed to post the Forest Management Plan “white paper” on the Hartford List Serv and mail it to Town Forest abutters.
- c) Katie agreed to finish the maps for the last three natural resource letters. Once the maps are completed, Matt will mail the letters.
- d) Jon volunteered to set up a site visit with one property owner and to make a follow-up phone call to another regarding the natural resource landowner outreach.
- e) Katie agreed to create a sign-up form for trails work in the Town Forest.
- f) Matt agreed to contact the VYCC to iron out an issue with the service agreement so that the agreement can be signed and the work scheduled.
- g) Jon volunteered to contact adjacent Town Forest property owners about the re-blazing.
- h) Matt agreed to work on a revised introduction to the Draft Recreation Management Plan and send it to the HCC for their comments.
- i) Matt agreed to set up a meeting with Planning Director Lori Hirshfield, for Tom, Angie and Matt to discuss the changes to the Draft Recreation Management Plan and incorporating it in the SE Group Recreation Management Plan.
- j) Jon noted that he will get a quote on the boundary marker signs for the David Chang Conservation Area.
- k) Dana reported that he will begin work on treating invasive plants in early July at the David Chang Conservation Area.
- l) Matt agreed to make two copies of the letter and maps the description of the natural resource value of the Quechee Lakes Corporation (Taurus Investment Holdings) 640-acre property that is for sale, and mail to the Vermont Land Trust and provide one copy to Tom Kahl.
- m) Matt will work with a sign maker to develop a design for the HCC Conservation Award plaque.
- n) Matt agreed to post links to information on Bobolinks on the HCC webpage.
- o) Jon reported that he will work with Charlie Reibel of the Hartford Area Career Technology Center to mark the trees to be cut for the October 10th and 11th Game of Logging.
- p) Matt agreed to inquire about holding the July 6th HCC Meeting outdoors.