

Draft Minutes of the
Hartford Conservation Commission
June 7, 2021

Members Present: Jon Bouton, Katie Mann, Lee Michaelides and chair Tom Kahl.

Staff Present: Planner Matt Osborn.

Others Present: Peg Merrens of the Upper Valley Land Trust and Selectboard Liaison Dennis Brown.

A remote meeting of the Conservation Commission in compliance with the Vermont Open Meeting Law was held on Monday, June 7, 2021. Tom Kahl called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Tom read the Act 92 Open Meeting Law Script.

1. Discussion of a Possible Conservation Easement for the Hartford Town Forest: Peg Merrens, Vice President of Conservation at the Upper Valley Land Trust (UVLT) was present to discuss conservation easements and the UVLT procedures. Matt Osborn welcomed her. Peg noted that by granting a conservation easement on a property, the landowner gives up the rights to develop their property. For a town forest, the property is typically managed for recreation and low impact forestry. The conservation easement would be conveyed to the Land Trust. The Land Trust would then be responsible to enforce the conservation easement annually in perpetuity. The easement runs with the land. The UVLT has worked with several municipalities in the Upper Valley to create conservation easements on town lands including several town forests.

Jon Bouton asked if the Town could use the donated conservation easement as a match for a grant to assist with the creation of a conservation easement on private lands and when is the timing right to do so? Peg responded yes regarding leveraging for grants. In Vermont, there are more grant opportunities for conservation easements for agricultural lands and for water quality projects. Regarding the Open Space Institute grants, local matches and/or cash is required. As for timing, Peg stated that the timing is right when there is community support for a project. She added that in her opinion it is always a good time to protect land. Peg stated that the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board is another source of funding for conservation easements. Jon asked if a parcel adjacent to the Town Forest that had wetlands would be a good candidate for a grant to conserve the property. Peg responded that it would be more likely in New Hampshire than in Vermont. In Vermont, there are currently more funds available for water quality projects.

Tom Kahl asked about the cost of a conservation easement. Peg responded that for a property the size of the Town Forest, it is generally in the \$16,000-\$20,000 range and includes research, a detailed report, legal fees and the stewardship endowment.

As for process, Peg noted that a project would have to be a high priority for a community for the UVLT to sponsor a conservation easement. If so, UVLT staff would conduct a site visit and prepare an assessment which would go to a UVLT review committee that would make a recommendation to the UVLT Board, who would make the final decision to approve the conservation easement. The process also would require a detailed management plan. Jon Bouton responded that we have multiple management plans for the Town Forest and are currently working on consolidating the plans.

Lee Michaelides asked if the conservation easement would allow us to enter an agreement with the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association regarding trail maintenance. Peg responded yes and that annual renewals make sense.

Tom Kahl thanked Peg for attending.

2. **Changes to the Agenda:** Tom Kahl asked if there are any changes to the agenda. Jon Bouton suggested adding the White River Partnership’s offer to assist with the clean-up of a dumping site on Old River Road.
3. **Approval of Minutes:** Tom Kahl asked if there were any changes to the minutes of May 3, 2021 HCC Meeting. Jon Bouton noted a correction. Tom stated that the minutes are approved with the noted correction by unanimous consent.
4. **Green-Up Day Results:** Matt Osborn stated that in spite of the Covid restrictions, Green-Up Day was successful. Tom Kahl acknowledged Matt’s work as Hartford’s Green-Up Day Coordinator. Matt presented the following report on the Green-Up Day 2021:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| Town Hall Dumpster | 1.32 tons |
| Quechee Dumpster | 1.19 tons |
| Items brought to Solid Waste facility | 0.78 tons |
| Total Trash Collected | 3.29 tons |
| Tires collected | 40 |
| # Volunteers* | 343 |
| Bags Used | 800 |

5. Town Forest:

- a. Winter 2022 Timber Harvest: Matt Osborn reported that he has been working closely with County Forester A.J. Follensbee to convert A.J.’s bid sheet and description to the Town’s standard Request for Proposals (RFP) format as well as the contract document. The RFP was approved by Town Manager Tracy Yarlott-Davis and she directed Matt to proceed with advertising the RFP. Matt noted that Tracy emphasized the importance of “communicating to the public on when, how and why we are doing the timber harvest.” Matt noted that the HCC has recognized the importance of this from the beginning. Matt stated that the RFP will be released tomorrow. It will be posted on the Town Website, the List Serve and an advertisement in the Valley News. In addition, A.J. will e-mail the RFP to a list of 25 area loggers who have a forwarder (required for the project). The deadline for proposals is July 6th at 4:00 p.m. and a pre-bid tour is scheduled for Monday, June 21st at 9:00 a.m. Matt agreed to advertise the RFP. Tom Kahl suggested adding a note regarding the RFP on the HCC webpage. Matt agreed.
- b. MOU between the Town, Cover Home Repair and Richard Wright for the Hemlock: Matt Osborn reported that Town Manager Tracy Yarlott-Davis approved the Memorandum of Understanding for hemlock to be cut by the logger in the Town Forest and delivered to the Wright Sawmill for ramp construction projects that Cover does in Hartford. The HCC also will use hemlock for bridge decking in the Town Forest. Tom has sent the MOU to Richard Wright/Mary Hutchins of Wright’s Sawmill and Bill Neukomm of Cover Home Repair for their review and approval and will follow up.
- c. Recreation Management Plan. Matt Osborn reported that he was told that currently only time sensitive items are being scheduled for Selectboard agendas. Therefore, we will have to wait to see when the item will be scheduled.
- d. Compilation of Town Forest Management Plans: Jon Bouton reported that he has been working with Angie Emerson on a compilation/summary of the different management plans for the Town Forest. He agreed to continue to work with Angie.

- e. Trails Day: Tom Kahl reported that Trails Day is scheduled for Saturday, June 19th. He noted that work is needed on Simonds Way, the Three Bridges, and Jill's Trails and includes bridges. Tom developed a materials list with the assistance of Tim Schaal and got a quote from Fogg's Hardware. Matt Osborn reported that he spoke to Department of Public Works Assistant Director Jeremy Delisle about delivering three tons of hardpack to the Town Forest. Jon Bouton, Lee Michaelides and Tom volunteered to lead crews. Katie agreed to set up the registration form for a virtual trail signup for routine trail maintenance similar to what was done in 2020. Matt agreed to promote the event on the List Serve, Facebook, the town website, Parks and Recreation Department weekly posting and a flyer to go to the libraries. Matt agreed to purchase the materials the Trails Day cookout. Jon agreed to be the chef for the Trails Day cookout.
 - f. Wayfinding Signs. Matt Osborn reported that he sent a request to VTrans for a determination on whether our proposed wayfinding signs are permissible and if a state permit is required. He is waiting to hear back from them. Matt agreed to price-out the wayfinding signs once we receive state approval and seek approval from the Town to purchase the signs.
 - g. Story Walk and Scavenger Hunt Request: Tom Kahl reiterated that at the May meeting the HCC granted the Quechee Library permission to hold a Story Walk and Scavenger Hunt at the Town Forest. Jon has met with and will continue working with Kate Schaal and other library staff to work out the details.
 - h. Hartford Regional Resource Class School Project: Jon Bouton reported that he and Tom Kahl had met on May 28th with Steve Gagliardone and Catherine Farnsworth of the Hartford Regional Resource Center, which is a program to help 14 to 21 year-olds with cognitive disabilities adjust to independent living. The two projects the group looked at were a pollinator garden on the top of the northern former upper reservoir embankment and cleaning water bars on the Simonds Way trail. Steve and Catherine thought that these would be worthwhile projects and will consider for the fall of 2021. Lee Michaelides volunteered to send some information on UVM Master Gardiners experienced in pollinator gardens that Jon will forward to Catherine Farnsworth.
6. **Private Landowner Outreach**: Tom Kahl reported that he will set up a meeting with a Jericho property owner that he spoke to last fall. Katie Mann agreed to work on maps for the next ten property owners of ranked parcels in Hartford in May and June. Matt agreed to verify ownership records.
 7. **Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions (AVCC) Tiny Grant Program**: Tom Kahl reported that the HCC was awarded the AVCC grant on behalf of the Hartford Salamander Team, to partner with the North Branch Nature Center on their Amphibian Road Crossing (ARC) program. Matt agreed to have funds directed to the North Branch Nature Center once the check from AVCC is received. Tom reported that the Hartford Salamander Team was busy this spring on rainy nights at key road crossings shepherding amphibians safely across. Tom reported that the Hartford Salamander Team held a webinar this spring and 65 folks attended, many from other Upper Valley towns.
 8. **Climate Action Plan Report**: Jon Bouton reported that a draft of the Climate Action Plan was completed. Comments on the Plan are being accepted and the Plan will be presented to the Selectboard on June 29th.
 9. **Educational Partnerships**: Katie Mann reported that Vital Communities will be offering ecosystem services. She volunteered to look into it.
 10. **Invasive Plant Promotion**: Jon Bouton reported that he has been providing the Parks & Recreation Department with information on invasive plants for distribution on the weekly Constant Contact e-

mail. He noted the incredible spread of Wild Chervil along roadways and rapid growth of Japanese Knotweed throughout town.

11. Game of Logging Classes: Jon Bouton reported that the Game of Logging classes in the Town Forest on May 15th, May 22nd and May 23rd went well. The Hartford Area Career Technology Center plans to have additional classes in the future.

12. HCC Logo: Tom Kahl noted that Mary Hutchins had presented a draft logo to the HCC. Jon suggested that we should review other Hartford logos such as the Parks and Recreation Department logo. Further discussion was postponed until the next meeting when Mary will be present.

13. Announcements/Other Business:

a. Old River Road Dumping Site: Jon Bouton reported that he was contacted by Christian Pelletier of the White River Partnership (WRP) about their interest in sending volunteers to help clean up a dump site below a steep bank in between Old River Road and the White River ½ mile from the Hartford Village Bridge. The WRP is hoping the Town could provide a truck and pay for disposal fees. Jon acknowledged that we will need to address the insurance issue. Matt Osborn responded that the site has been cleaned up in the past by the Conservation Commission only to have more items dumped there. He stated that it is a chronic problem. He also noted that it is a very steep bank and expressed concern about safety of volunteers due to the steep bank. Matt agreed to look into it to see what can be done. Jon stated that he thinks it is a win/win situation and hopes the Town can work it out. Lee Michaelides stated that he has done green-up in that location and cautioned about the presence of poison ivy.

b. HCC Expenditures: Tom Kahl requested a list of HCC expenditures and the balance of the conservation fund. Matt Osborn agreed.

14. Next Meeting: Tom Kahl reported that the next HCC meeting is scheduled for Monday, July 12th at 7:00 p.m. He asked if the meeting could be in-person and outside. Lee Michaelides noted that he will be out of town. Matt Osborn suggested contacting the three HCC members who are not in attendance this evening. Tom Kahl agreed to e-mail them.

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

16. Meeting Action Items:

- a) Matt agreed to advertise the RFP for the timber sale.
- b) Tom agreed to follow up approval of the timber harvest hemlock with Richard Wright/Mary Hutchins of Wright's Sawmill and Bill Neukomm of Cover.
- c) Jon agreed to continue to work with Angie on a draft of the compilation of the Town Forest Management Plans.
- d) Matt agreed to purchase the materials the Trails Day cookout.
- e) Matt agreed to promote Trails Day on the List Serve, Facebook, the town website, Parks and Recreation Department weekly posting and a flyer to go to the libraries.
- f) Jon, Lee and Tom volunteered to lead crews on Trails Day.
- g) Jon agreed to be the chef for the Trails Day cookout.
- h) Katie agreed to set up the registration form for folks who want to conduct trails maintenance on their own throughout the summer.
- i) Matt agreed to price-out the wayfinding signs once we receive state approval and seek approval from the Town to purchase the signs.

- j) Jon agreed to meet with the Quechee librarian staff to finalize details about the Story Walk and Scavenger Hunt in the HTF this summer.
- k) Lee agreed to send out information from UVM on pollinator gardens that Jon will then forward to Catherine Farnsworth of the Hartford Regional Resource Center.
- l) Tom reported that he will set up a meeting with a Jericho property owner that he spoke to last fall.
- m) Katie agreed to work on maps for the next ten property owners of ranked parcels in Hartford.
- n) Matt agreed to verify ownership records.
- o) Matt agreed to have funds directed to the North Branch Nature Center.
- p) Katie volunteered to look into Vital Communities new program on ecosystem services.
- q) Matt agreed to obtain a list of HCC expenditures since the end of the last fiscal year and inquire about the current balance of the conservation fund.
- r) Matt agreed to look into clean-up of the Old River Road dump site.
- s) Tom agreed to e-mail HCC members not in attendance this evening to see if they prefer meeting in person and outside for the July 12th HCC meeting.