

Draft Minutes of the
Hartford Conservation Commission
August 28, 2023

Members Present: Chris Beetham, (8/7/27) Sky Claud, (7/31/27) Mike Harris (8/7/27) Mary Hutchins, (11/4/23) Ted Levin (11/15/25) and vice-chair Katie Mann (8/24/24).

Staff Present: Town Planner Matt Osborn.

Others Present: Lee Michaelides, and Selectboard Liaison Mary Erdei.

A hybrid Hartford Conservation Commission (HCC) Meeting in compliance of the Open Meeting Law was held on Monday, August 28th in Room 2 of the Hartford Town Hall located at 171 Bridge Street, White River Junction. Vice-chair Katie Mann called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. and proceeded to read the Hybrid Meeting Script followed by roll call. Katie welcomed newly appointed Conservation Commission members Chris Beetham and Mike Harris.

1. **Approval of Minutes:** Katie asked if there are any changes to the draft minutes of 7/17/23. There were none. Katie stated that the HCC minutes of 7/17/23 are approved as written by unanimous consent.
2. **Public Comments:** Katie asked if there are any public comments. There were none.
3. **Discussion of HCC Members Interests:** Katie noted that with three new members, we should take this opportunity to learn about one another and discuss member's interests to see what projects the HCC might be interested in working on.

Katie started by reporting that she has an educational background in conservation and currently works for the Appalachian Trail Conference. She noted that she has served on the HCC for more than four years. Her interests lie in protecting native ecosystems, maintaining public access and landowner education.

Ted Levin noted that he has served on the HCC the past two year. He has a background as a naturalist and he is a nature writer who spends a lot of time outdoors.

Mike Harris stated that he is an outdoor enthusiast/environmentalist and works as a conservation lawyer. He has an interest in invasive plants.

Chris Beetham noted that he is an environmental scientist who has done consulting work. He is interested in public access and is on the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association Board.

Mary Hutchins noted that she has been on the HCC more than ten years. She works as a graphic artist. She is an outdoor enthusiast who likes hiking, horseback riding and snowmobiling and stated that she helps out on a local farm.

Sky Claud stated that she has a background in sustainability and geography. She noted that she is passionate about the outdoors and works as a nature-based preschool teacher.

Lee Michaelides stated that he served on the HCC for 4+ years. He is an avid mountain biker who does trail work and likes to work on special projects as needed.

Katie discussed the three properties that the Conservation Commission manages:

- Hartford Town Forest -423 acres near Center of Town.
- Maanawaka Conservation Area - 21.5 acres in Wilder.
- David Chang Conservation Area – 6.5 acres in Quechee.

Matt Osborn noted that over the last five years, the HCC has put much of its focus on the Town Forest including the following projects:

- Updating the Recreation Management Plan.
- Conducting a trail assessment.
- Updating the Forest Management Plan.
- Creating an Integrated Management Plan for the Town Forest.
- Conducting a timber harvest.

Matt went on to note that the Conservation Commission has done a pretty good job letting the members determine the work program and taking the lead on projects that members are interested in. With Town Forest projects winding down and with three new members, there is an opportunity to discuss and decide what the future work program will be.

4. Fiscal Year 2024/2025 HCC Budget: Matt noted that each year, the Town goes through the budget process. The Conservation Commission budget comes under the Department of Planning and Development budget. Each department head develops a budget and presents it to the Town Manager. The Town Manager makes revisions and sends the budget to the Selectboard who hold budget sessions during the fall and finalize the budget to be presented to the Town voters to vote on in March. Matt noted that the fiscal year 2024/2025 budget runs from 7/1/24 to 6/30/25. He noted that most of the Conservation Commission budget falls under the general fund which is restricted to the designated fiscal year. At the end of the fiscal year, unspent funds are returned to the general fund for the Selectboard to decide on how the funds are to be used. Mary Erdei stated that the Selectboard will likely be recommending level funding.

Matt noted that the Conservation Commission also has a reserve fund account (conservation fund) that was established in the early 1990s and has been used to purchase conservation lands, assist landowners in creating conservation easements on their land and other conservation projects. Last winter, \$11,036.58 in timber harvest revenues were directed to the conservation fund by the Selectboard. The balance as of June 30th was \$106,790.47. Matt noted that since there haven't been expenditures from the conservation fund in the last few years, Planning and Development Director Lori Hirshfield is not likely to include the \$3,000 conservation fund appropriation in her department budget. The HCC can provide justification for the conservation fund request to the Selectboard when the Planning and Development Department budget is presented to the Selectboard. The following is the current fiscal year HCC budget and a draft budget developed by Matt and HCC chair Tom Kahl for HCC consideration:

<u>Category</u>	<u>2023/2024 Budget</u>	<u>2024/2025 Budget*</u>
Travel & Meetings	\$175	\$75
Advertising	\$180	\$100
Memberships	\$250	\$250
Materials and Supplies	\$275	\$605
Forestry	\$650	\$500
Contracted Serv. (Green-Up Day)	\$2,000	\$2,000
<u>Conservation Fund (Reserve Fund)</u>	<u>\$3,000</u>	<u>\$3,000</u>
Total	\$6,530	\$6,530

* Matt & Tom suggested a level funded budget with changes to individual accounts.

Mike noted that Governor Scott is supporting efforts of private partners to meet conservation goals instead of the government purchasing land. Mike suggested asking the Selectboard for the \$3,000 conservation fund appropriation to incentivize conservation easements. The HCC agreed. It was agreed to finalize the recommended budget at the October 2nd HCC meeting.

5. **Hartford Salamander Team:** Katie noted that Hartford Salamander Team (HST) member Ben Fletcher wasn't in attendance. She stated that the HST, which formed two years ago, has developed a strong following in Hartford and surrounding communities and has sponsored educational programs on topics such as salamanders, fungi and insects. Matt noted that the HCC agreed to assist the HST with \$300 to go toward programming. He added that the HST has had success engaging younger adults. It was agreed to continue the discussion about educational programs at the October 2nd meeting.
6. **Climate Action Plan:** Lee Michaelides reported that the Climate Action Team is currently evaluating goals. He added that the Tree Board and volunteers removed Japanese Knotweed from a section of Lyman Point Park riverbank and planted 14 trees from their nursery. The idea is to control the Knotweed and open the view of the White River while encouraging native vegetation to come back. Lee stated that a large amount of invasive plants were removed from the site.
7. **Former Lower Hurricane Reservoir:** Katie noted that last month there was discussion about the meadow that has emerged since the dam for the Lower Hurricane Reservoir was removed about ten years ago. According to the Forest Management Plan, it recommended mowing the meadow annually to ensure habitat diversity in the Town Forest. Jon Bouton suggested cutting every 2-3 years. Ted didn't think the cutting is necessary and recommends leaving the meadow alone. The HCC agreed.
8. **Town Forest Invasive Plants:** Katie noted that there is honeysuckle near the former Lower Hurricane Reservoir. Some of it was removed during the June trails day event. She said honeysuckle is easy to remove. Katie stated that a HCC workday to remove invasive plants is planned for early May, 2024. Chris suggested that the HCC scout areas of invasive plants in the Town Forest. Mary Erdei reported that Hanover has had success removing garlic mustard in the spring and involving the general public. Katie suggested that the HCC sponsor a Town initiative to remove invasive plants. She wondered if we could get help from the public identifying GPS locations of invasive plants. Sky volunteered to investigate. Katie suggested a public information campaign talking first to the Quechee Lakes Landowners Association since they have many landowners and look at sponsoring workshops at village libraries. Mike suggested starting with a list of top five invasive plants. It was agreed to continue discussion at the October 2nd meeting.
9. **Timber Harvest Interpretive Signs:** Katie noted that the timber harvest was done to create a healthier, more diverse forest in the wake of climate change and to avoid a monoculture of beech understory. It was intended that the HCC would develop interpretive signs to inform the public about the purpose. She asked the HCC if it is worth the effort and will people read the signs. Ted responded that it is worth the effort. Lee suggested keeping it simple and create one sign with a QR Code to link to more information. The HCC agreed. Katie agreed to work on the interpretive sign.
10. **Timber Harvest Clean-up:** Matt reported that Hartford Area Career and Technology Center Teacher Matt Dragon informed him that his Natural Resources will be able to undertake clean-up work in the Town Forest this fall including cutting down stumps that were left during the timber harvest. Katie noted that the HCC wanted to retain some of the stumps for habitat. She suggested that the Natural

Resources class cut some of the stumps but not all. The HCC agreed. Matt agreed to talk to Matt Dragon. Katie asked if there is other clean-up work. Matt responded that he will contact County Forester A.J. Follensbee.

- 11. Game of Logging Training Request:** Matt reported that Hartford Area Career and Technology Center Teacher Matt Dragon made a request to conduct the annual Game of Logging training for his students at the Town Forest. County Forester A.J. Follensbee agreed to mark the trees to be cut. The HCC agreed to permit the Game of Logging training. Matt agreed to talk to Matt Dragon and A.J.
- 12. Moose Brook Trail Bridge:** Matt reported that Engineer Tim Schaal will design and construct improvements to the bridge with help from Wayne Hoisington. Tim will donate his time and materials to repair the bridge which is a designated trail for snowmachines.
- 13. Town Forest Boundary Painting:** Lee stated that we need to keep this on the “to do list”.
- 14. Book “Our Better Nature”:** Matt reported that he delivered the books to three Hartford libraries. Now that school is back in session, he will deliver copies to school libraries. Katie volunteered to deliver the book to the White River School.
- 15. Book “Nature’s Best Hope”:** Matt reported that he contacted the four town libraries about Ecologist/Entomologist Doug Tallamy’s book “Nature’s Best Hope Young Person’s Edition”. All four libraries would like a copy. Matt will contact the school librarians now that school is in session.
- 16. Private Landowner Conservation Outreach:** Katie noted that she will revise the letter. Matt agreed to correct the conservation brochure and prepare the mailing.
- 17. HCC Conservation Award:** Lee stated that he will work on written description of the awards program for the next meeting.
- 18. Announcements/Reports:**
 - a. Birds and Berries Walk: Ted reported that the weather didn’t cooperate for the August 17th walk and berry planting so there was a small turnout. However, they did plant a wide variety of berries in the areas where cutting took place last winter. Ted noted that red maple are coming in the cut areas.
 - b. Hurricane Trail Run: Matt reported that the Parks and Recreation Department held the Hurricane Trail Run on Saturday. They decided to shorten the course and have the 10k race utilize the 5k course twice which meant only a small part of the Town Forest was utilized for the race. Matt noted that according to Parks and Recreation Department Director Scott Hausler, the race went well.
 - c. Pollinator Pathway: Sky reported that she is compiling a list of native pollinators. Katie suggested looking at the pollinator work that the Vermont Center for Ecostudies is doing. Sky agreed.
- 19. Next HCC Meeting:** Katie noted that the next meeting is scheduled for Monday, October 2nd at 7:00 p.m.
- 20. Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 8:58 p.m.
- 21. Meeting Action Items:**
 - a. It was agreed to finalize the recommended HCC budget at the October 2nd HCC meeting.
 - b. It was agreed to continue the discussion about educational programs at the October 2nd meeting.

- c. It was agreed to continue discussion on an invasive plant campaign at the October 2nd meeting.
- d. Katie agreed to work on the interpretive sign for the timber harvest.
- e. Matt agreed to talk to Matt Dragon and A.J. Follensbee about timber harvest clean-up work.
- f. Matt agreed to talk to Matt Dragon and A.J. about the Game of Logging.
- g. Matt will deliver the book “Our Better Nature” to school librarians.
- h. Katie volunteered to deliver the book to the White River School.
- i. Matt will reach out to schools’ librarians to see if they are interested in receiving a copy of the book “Nature’s Best Hope Young Person’s Edition” before he orders this book.
- j. Lee will work on written description of the HCC Awards Program.
- k. We need to keep the Town Forest boundary painting on the “to do list”.
- l. Katie agreed to revise the natural resource letters and give to Matt.
- m. Matt agreed to correct the conservation brochure and mail the letters to property owners.
- n. Sky volunteered to continue work compiling a list of native pollinators and look at the pollinator work that the Vermont Center for Ecostudies is doing.

22. HCC Member Terms: Chris Beetham, (8/7/27) Sky Claud, (7/31/27) Mike Harris (8/7/27) Mary Hutchins, (11/4/23) Ted Levin (11/15/25) vice-chair Katie Mann (8/24/24). and chair Tom Kahl (8/24/24).