

Draft Minutes of the
Hartford Conservation Commission
August 31, 2020

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

Staff Present: Planner Matt Osborn.

Others Present: Selectboard Liaison Emma Behrens and Selectboard and Climate Action Committee Member Alan Johnson.

A meeting of the Conservation Commission was held at the Maxfield Sports Complex on Route 5 South, Hartford in Pavilion A on Monday, August 31, 2020. Tom Kahl called the meeting to order at 5:33 p.m. Tom thanked Selectboard Liaison Alan Johnson for his commitment as a liaison to the Conservation Commission over the last two years. Tom welcomed new Selectboard Liaison Emma Behrens. Introductions were made.

- 1. Climate Action Plan:** Climate Action Committee and Selectboard member Alan Johnson was present to discuss the Climate Action Plan that is being developed to address how Hartford as a municipality can achieve carbon neutrality by 2030. He noted that the Selectboard authorized the \$30,000 budgeted expenditure even though there is currently a town spending freeze since it is important not to delay work on climate action. Alan noted that the Plan's work will be incorporated into future town budgets. He stated that there will be lots of public outreach and stakeholders will be invited to participate in the Plan. Alan stated that as land managers, the Conservation Commission has a unique role to play. He noted that the Climate Action Committee has been meeting 2-3 times a month. He invited the Conservation Commission to participate in the meetings. Mary Hutchins volunteered. Alan noted that the Climate Action Committee is reaching out to other communities about climate action and noted that it is essential to work on transportation as a regional issue. Chair Tom Kahl thanked Alan for attending the meeting.
- 2. Additions/Changes to the Agenda:** Tom Kahl asked if there are any changes or additions to the agenda. Matt Osborn suggested adding camping in the Town Forest and Maanawaka Conservation Area to the agenda. The HCC agreed.
- 3. Approval of Minutes:** Tom Kahl asked if there were any changes to the minutes of July 6, 2020. There were no changes. Tom stated that the minutes are approved by unanimous consent as written.
- 4. Forest Management Plan for Town Forest:** Tom Kahl reported that a virtual meeting on the Draft Forest Management Plan with County Forester A.J. Follensbee was held on July 15th. He thanked Jon Bouton and Matt Osborn for participating in the meeting. Tom stated that this evening the HCC needs to decide how to proceed.

It was noted that today was the last day for public comments on the draft plan that have been solicited since early July. Katie Mann noted that some comments have been received and she will distribute them to the HCC and A.J. Follensbee.

Tom Kahl noted that A.J. Follensbee had questions in an August 7, 2020 memorandum regarding details for forest management prescriptions including the temporary closure of trails during the timber harvest, the type of logging system to be used, the location of a log landing and transporting the logs out of the forest, type of timber sale.

Matt noted that the Town Forest doesn't receive a great deal of use in the winter. The temporary closure of a small number of trails shouldn't be an imposition to Town Forest users. Notices and signs regarding the trail closings will need to be done. Regarding the log landing, Jon responded that the area adjacent to the former Lower Hurricane Reservoir makes the most sense for a log landing and that it will not affect the Trailhead Parking Area.

Jon noted that A.J. will mark all of the trees to be cut. The cutting will involve selective cutting and a patch cut to create more diverse wildlife habitat. He added that the cutting will involve the use of a forwarder that cuts the logs to length as opposed to a skidder that drags trees out of the forest. Matt commented that he vividly recalls a snowshoe in the Town Forest with former town forester in 1998 where Paul noted extensive damage to trees from dragging cut trees out of the forest during the timber harvests in the 1980s. He noted that the use of a forwarder would greatly reduce impacts. The HCC consensus was to proceed with the cut to length system.

Jon noted that leaving some cut trees on the ground has many benefits, but may appear to be messy by some. He suggested explaining the benefits to the public prior to the timber harvest.

There was discussion about the bidding process. Dana Hazen noted that the Town needs to decide on whether to do a lump sum bid or pay as you cut. He stated that it is easier to evaluate a lump sum bid, but he prefers the pay as you cut approach. It was agreed to get input from Forester A.J. Follensbee. Jon noted that A.J. will prepare the bid documents which will be reviewed by the HCC. Matt noted that the going out to bid will follow town procurement policies with the bid awarded to the highest bidder that meets all of the requirements specified in the bid documents. The town manager must sign off on the bid documents and the forester will review the bids to make sure they meet all of the requirements.

Tom agreed to get back to A.J. with answers to the questions in his August 7, 2020 memorandum.

Tom suggested going back to the Selectboard this fall to approve the Forest Management Plan. The HCC agreed. Once the Forest Management Plan is approved, the HCC will work on planning for the 2022 timber harvest which would mean going out to bid in 2021.

Jon suggested that the HCC review the proposed schedule in the Forest Management Plan and get comments to A.J. as soon as possible.

5. **Emerald Ash Borer:** Tom Kahl reported that the Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Program announced a grant program on dealing with the Emerald Ash Borer. Karen Watson of the Hartford Tree Board reached out to the Conservation Commission to see if we would take the lead to apply for a grant. Tom noted that the Town doesn't currently have a Tree Warden. Tom stated that the Tree Board's priority is to chemically treat the ash trees that the Tree Board planted at Veterans Memorial Park and the Tip Top Building. Jon Bouton stated that he doesn't believe that the HCC has the time or expertise to take the lead on the project. The Commission agreed. Tom also noted that the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions advertised Vermont Invasives organization's Emerald Ash Borer Awareness Week from September 12-19. Tom suggested erecting a flyer that can be obtained from Vermont Invasives at the Town Forest Kiosk. The HCC agreed. Tom volunteered to let the Hartford Tree Board know that the HCC can't take the lead in applying for the EAB grant application and will take care of procuring and posting the flyer in the Town Forest.
6. **Use of Glyphosate on Town Properties:** Matt Osborn reported that former Town Manager, Leo Pullar, prohibited the use of Glyphosate on town properties. Staff is investigating whether it was instituted as an official town policy. At this point, nothing has been found to show that it is a town

policy. Matt reported that Planning and Development Department Director Lori Hirshfield suggested that the HCC prepare a memo outlining the history of the decision and justification for the use of Glyphosate to be presented to the department heads and town manager. There was discussion and consensus that Glyphosate is safe when used carefully to isolate treatment of invasive plants. Jon Bouton and Dana Hazen volunteered to work on language for the memo.

7. Town Forest:

- a. VYCC Work Crew: Matt Osborn reported that the VYCC work crew completed the second week of work in the Town Forest last week. The first week in July, the VYCC relocated the lower section of Pine Drop Trail. The second week, VYCC worked on rehabilitating several areas on the Goat Trail including two banked turns. Matt stated that he made daily visits to the Town Forest during the trails work and that he participated in the Goat Trail walk-through on Friday with VYCC Supervisor Jenn Seredejko. Matt noted that the VYCC will prepare a report on the trails work and send to the town along with photographs of the work. Tom thanked Angie Emerson and Lee Michaelides for brushing out/closing the former Pine Drop section of trail, relocating intersection trail markers and blazing the new section of Pine Drop Trail.
- b. Trails Committee: Tom Kahl thanked Katie Mann for developing a google document for the volunteer trails sign-up. Tom noted that several volunteers signed up. Tom stated that the HCC will have to decide what to do with a gulley on the new relocated section of the Pine Drop Trail. The gulley is underlaid with two large downed trees that are decomposing. Mountain biker Bill Brown placed several stones in the gulley to make it more rideable in the interim. Matt Osborn noted that the gulley is within 30' of a perennial stream and will require a Conditional Use Permit if excavation is done. It was agreed to look more closely at a permanent solution for the gulley and a possible Conditional Use Permit application this winter followed by work in the summer of 2021.
- c. Trails Map: Tom Kahl noted that with the relocated Pine Drop Trail, the trails map will need to be revised. Dana Hazen volunteered to update the Trails Map once we receive the coordinates from VYCC.
- d. Camping in the Town Forest & Maanawaka Conservation Area: Dana Hazen expressed concern about the impacts of camping in the Town Forest and the Maanawaka Conservation Area. Selectboard Liaison Emma Behrens responded that the Selectboard already determined that camping was not appropriate at three sites including the Maanawaka Conservation Area, Hurricane Forest Wildlife Refuge and a site next to the Aquatic Center. She noted that the Selectboard has directed staff to evaluate camping opportunities on all Town parcels.
- e. Trees Down in the Hurricane Forest Wildlife Refuge: Matt Osborn reported that there are trees down in the Hurricane Forest Wildlife Refuge that the Parks and Recreation Department may not get to for a while. Jon Bouton and Dana Hazen volunteered to remove the trees this week.
- f. Game of Logging: Jon Bouton reported that the Hartford Area Career Technology Center Adult Education Class Game of Logging is scheduled to take place in the Town Forest on October 11 & 12. Jon will work with the HACTC and mark 12-15 trees for them to cut east of the Trailhead Kiosk.
- g. Town Forest Knotweed: Dana Hazen noted that this is the best time of year to treat invasive plants and should be done before the first fall frost. He suggested treating the section of Japanese Knotweed along Reservoir Road and using Glyphosate since it is the most effective treatment and

he considers it safe to use. Matt Osborn noted that the Town has not authorized its use on Town property. Therefore, he stated that the HCC needs to wait until it receives authorization. As noted in #6 above, the HCC and staff will be preparing a memo to department heads and the town manager regarding the use of Glyphosate.

8. **David Chang Conservation Area:** Dana Hazen reported that he treated invasive plants in the David Chang Conservation Area this summer. He plans to go back in 2021 to continue the work. He also reported that the European Black Alder, an invasive tree, exists on the property and should be removed. The HCC agreed.
9. **Stream Restoration Site Visit:** Katie Mann reported that five HCC members attended the August 20th site visit on Podunk Brook in West Hartford with Greg Russ of the White River Partnership. She noted that although the site is not an ideal candidate for the specialized work, it was a worthwhile site visit and demonstrates that the concept is worth pursuing. The HCC agreed. Jon Bouton suggested looking at a site in the Town Forest and suggested that the HCC partner with another organization and not take the lead. The HCC agreed. It was agreed to continue discussion this winter.
10. **Announcements:** There were no announcements.
11. **Next Meeting:** Tom Kahl reported that the next HCC meeting is scheduled for Monday, October 5th at 7:00. He asked the Commission if they preferred meeting in-person or remotely. The Commission agreed to meet remotely and keep the 7:00 p.m. meeting time.
12. **Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 7:44 p.m.
13. **Meeting Action Items:**
 - a) Katie will distribute public comments received on the draft Forest Management Plan.
 - b) Tom agreed to get back to A.J. with answers to his August 7, 2020 memorandum questions.
 - c) Tom suggested going back to the Selectboard this fall to approve the Forest Management Plan.
 - d) Jon suggested that the HCC review the proposed schedule in the Forest Management Plan and get comments to the A.J. as soon as possible.
 - e) Tom volunteered to let the Hartford Tree Board know that the HCC cannot take the lead in preparing the EAB grant application and will take care of the flyer for the Emerald Ash Borer Awareness Week.
 - f) Jon and Dana volunteered to work on language for the memo on the use of Glyphosate on the Hartford properties managed by the HCC.
 - g) It was agreed to look more closely at a permanent solution for the Pine Drop gulley on the newly relocated lower trail section, and a possible Conditional Use Permit application this winter followed by work in the summer of 2021.
 - h) Dana volunteered to update the Hartford Town Forest Trails Map once we receive the coordinates from VYCC for the relocated section of the Lower Pine Drop trail.
 - i) Jon and Dana volunteered to remove the trees across the trail in the Hurricane Wildlife Refuge this week.
 - j) Jon will work with the HACTC and mark up to 20 trees for them to cut 12-15 east of the Trailhead Kiosk.
 - k) It was agreed to continue discussion this winter on potential stream restoration sites and projects.