

**Draft Minutes of the**  
Hartford Conservation Commission  
November 6, 2023

**Members Present:** Chris Beetham (8/7/27), Skylar Cloud (7/30/27), Mike Harris (8/7/27), Mary Hutchins (10/30/27), Ted Levin (11/15/25), and chair Tom Kahl, (8/24/24).

**Staff Present:** Town Planner Matt Osborn.

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

A hybrid Hartford Conservation Commission (HCC) Meeting in compliance of the Open Meeting Law was held on Monday, November 6th in Room 2 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. The attendees then briefly introduced themselves to first time guest Holly Henderson who is interested in collaborating with the HCC.

1. **Approval of Minutes:** Tom asked if there are any changes to the draft minutes of 10/2/23. There were none. Tom stated that the HCC minutes of 10/2/23 are approved as written by unanimous consent.
2. **Agenda:** Tom asked if there were any changes to the agenda. Discussion of the Route 5 Bicycle Corridor questionnaire was added.
3. **Public Comments:** Tom asked if there are any public comments. There were none.
4. **Partnership with the Hartford Salamander Team:** Hartford Salamander Team (HST) member Ben Fletcher was unable to attend this meeting. Sky volunteered to work with Ben on a partnership to collaboratively develop a regular natural science and stewardship education program. Tom noted that the HCC agreed to assist the HST with \$300 to go toward programming.
5. **Introduction to Hartford Environmental Stewardship Workshop:** The HCC agreed that the idea, initially discussed at the previous meeting, of an introductory workshop to introduce community members to various environmental citizen science and natural science stewardship opportunities should be pursued. The format would be short 5-minute presentations by various local environmental and natural science related organizations to introduce people to the many different opportunities to participate in conservation stewardship. A tentative date was set of Thursday 2/15/24 beginning at 6:30 p.m. in the Bugbee Senior Center. Matt will check on the availability of Bugbee.

The initial list organizations to be contacted were:

- a. Vermont Institute of Natural Science – Ted
  - b. Vermont Center for Ecostudies – Ted
  - c. Hartford Garden Club – Tom
  - d. Hartford Tree Board – Lee
  - e. Hartford Climate Action Committee – Lee
  - f. Hartford Salamander Team – Sky
  - g. White River Partnership – Matt
  - h. Resilient Hartford - Matt
6. **Kestrel Boxes:** Ted noted that he has two Kestrel boxes that he hopes to install in open fields in Hartford. Mary will contact landowners Corabel Amal (Jericho Road) and Tom will contact Judy

Barwood (Christian St) to see if they are interested. If they are, Ted Levin will meet with the landowners to determine box placement details.

7. **Fiscal Year 2024/2025 HCC Budget:** Matt noted that the previously discussed HCC budget was incorporated into the Department of Planning and Development’s proposed budget to the sTown Manager and Selectboard.

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

Tom will attend the 11/28/23 selectboard meeting when this is presented to answer any questions.

8. **Future Trail Improvement Grants:** Chris noted that the HCC had recently received notice of a trail improvement grant opportunity from the Northern Forest Center’s Sustainable Trails Grant Program but there was not sufficient time to select a project and prepare an application. Chris volunteered to lead a team of HCC and community members to develop a reconnaissance list of potential Hartford trail improvements so that a future proposal could be efficiently prepared to meet grant application deadlines. Matt noted that other than small grants (under \$1,000 or so) Selectboard approval is required and there needs to be additional time to prepare a memo and get on a Selectboard agenda.
9. **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association (UVMBA):** Chris said that he had discussed the MOU with the UVMBA Chair Liz Burdette and she was in favor of extending it for a longer term. Chris made a motion to extend the 5/3/22 MOU for a period of three years. The motion was seconded by Mary and approved 6-0. Matt will pursue getting the MOU signed by the Hartford Town Manager.
10. **Town Forest Invasive Plants:** Mike confirmed that he is interested in working with Katie on invasive plant control in the Hartford Town Forest (HTF) with the intent that these measures would then be learned and used by residents throughout Hartford. It was discussed that workshops in both the spring and fall would be useful. It was confirmed to have a May 18, 2024 invasive plant workday in the HTF.
11. **Forest Interpretive Signs:** Tom circulated a hard copy of the draft sign to be posted in the HTF explaining the reasons for the felled trees in the timber harvest area. There was agreement with Mike’s suggestion to simplify the message by deleting the sub bullets. Since it is unknown when the HCC web page can be updated Lee Michaelides will help Katie and Tom set up an independent web page on ecological forestry that can be accessed by a QR Code on the sign.
12. **Game of Logging and Timber Harvest Clean-up:** Tom reported that the Hartford Area Career and Technology Center (HACTC) natural resource students had successfully completed their Game of Logging chain saw training from 10/17-10/20/23 and had cooperated in posting temporary trail closures during the training. Tom had discussed the following HACTC activities in the HTF with their

Teacher Matt Dragon and County Forester A.J. Follensbee and the HCC agreed that these were appropriate.

- Clean Up Winter 2023 Timber Harvest Area - The HACTC students will clean up areas in the 2023 timber harvest area, such as removing spring poles and bore cutting practice stumps. The County Forester, AJ Follensbee, will provide field guidance on the scope and areas for cleanup. Except for small spring poles, no additional standing trees will be felled.
- Cord of Wood - Similar to previous years, the HACTC can harvest one cord of already cut trees from the 2023 harvest area for firewood to sell for student fundraising.
- Polar Express Trees - The HACTC can cut a few (15-20) smaller (6-8 ft) white pine trees from around the Upper Reservoir for the WRJ Rotary Club's Polar Express Christmas fundraiser.
- Log Benches - The HACTC can cut benches from larger downed trees adjacent to established trails.

Tom circulated a notice that he will post a notice in the HTF kiosk alerting the public that this work will be occurring.

- 13. HTF Boundary Painting:** It was confirmed that the HTF boundaries need to be clearly marked with paint. Lee will contact Jon Bouton to ask Jon to help complete this in the spring.
- 14. Safety Vests:** Matt confirmed that he and Katie delivered safety vests to the Town Forest and Maanawaka Conservation Area kiosks to be loaned to visitors while recreating during hunting season.
- 15. Maanawaka Conservation Area:** Matt reported that he had posted the 2023 “No Hunting” signs in the Maanawaka Conservation Area. He said that many of the plywood boards supporting the paper signs are deteriorating and will need to be replaced in October 2024. Mike volunteered to cut six 14” x 20” pieces of exterior plywood by October 2024. He will look to see if he can find scrap wood and if not can contact Matt and purchase the wood through the Town’s account at Fogg’s lumber yard.
- 16. Bliss Road Class 4 Section:** The September discussion of Matt and Tom with four Bliss Road residents who want to have the Class 4 section of Bliss Road converted to a trail was discussed. The HCC reached consensus to support this conversion if the property owners abutting this section of the road are in favor. Since consensus of adjacent property owners is critical, the four neighbors will be reaching out to the adjacent property owners and the greater neighborhood. Matt reported that he was asked by Planning Director Lori Hirshfield to conduct research before discussing with the DPW Director, Fire Chief and Police Chief.
- 17. Memorial Tree:** Matt confirmed that he has sought administration approval of the HCC \$200 donation towards a memorial tree in Lyman Park for former HCC chair Linda Wilson.
- 18. Private Landowner Outreach:** This will be completed once the HCC webpage is updated.
- 19. HCC Award:** It was agreed to continue pursuing a local resident conservation of the year award. Lee will develop draft criteria and a selection process for the HCC to review.
- 20. Book “Nature’s Best Hope”:** Matt reported that he ordered the book by Ecologist/ Entomologist Doug Tallamy “Nature’s Best Hope Young Person’s Edition”. Once they arrive, he will deliver copies to the four Hartford libraries and four Hartford school libraries.

## 21. Announcements/Reports:

- a. AVCC Annual Summit: Tom reported that he had made a presentation at the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions annual summit on Thursday, October 19<sup>th</sup> about the 2021 Tiny Grant for the Hartford Salamander Team. Other Tiny Grant presentations were by the Bolton CC on building a walkway, Jericho and Richland on pollinator gardens, Johnson on Emerald Ash Borer outreach, Monckton on invasive plant removal, and Shrewsbury on a town game crossing inventory.
- b. Route 5 Corridor Bicycle Planning Questionnaire: The Town had recently received a questionnaire from VTRANS about a Route 5 bicycle corridor to be answered by the Hartford Selectboard and Planning Commission. Matt and Mary will convey to the Planning Commission and Selectboard respectively the HCC's enthusiastic support for a Route 5 bicycle corridor.

22. **Next HCC Meeting**: Tom noted that the next meeting is scheduled for Monday, 12/4 at 7:00 p.m.

23. **Adjournment**: The meeting was adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

## 24. Meeting Action Items:

- a. Sky volunteered to work with Ben of the Hartford Salamander Team on a partnership to collaboratively develop a regular natural science and stewardship education program
- b. Matt will check on the availability of the Bugbee Center for a February 15, 2024 Introduction to Environmental Workshop. The following local organizations will be contacted to see if they are interested: VINS and VCE-Ted, Garden Club-Tom, Tree Board and Climate Action Committee- Lee, Hartford Salamander Team- Sky, White River Partnership and Resilient Hartford- Matt.
- c. Mary will contact landowners Corabel Amal (Jericho Road) and Tom Judy Barwood (Christian St.) to see if they are interested in a Kestrel box on their property.
- d. Tom will attend the 11/28/23 selectboard meeting to answer any 2024-25 budget questions.
- e. Chris volunteered to lead a team of HCC and community members to develop a reconnaissance list of potential Hartford trail improvements for future grants.
- f. Matt will pursue getting the MOU with the UVMBA signed by the Hartford Town Manager.
- g. Lee will help Katie and Tom set up an independent webpage on ecological forestry that can be accessed by a QR Code so signs explaining the timber harvest can be posted in the HTF.
- h. Tom will post a notice in the HTF kiosk alerting the public that the HACTC will be working in the HTF this fall and winter.
- i. Lee will contact Jon Bouton to ask Jon to help complete painting the HTF boundaries in the spring.
- j. Mike volunteered to cut six 14" x 20" pieces of exterior plywood by October 2024 for mounting Maanawaka No Hunting signs.
- k. Matt agreed to conduct research and discuss the potential changing of the Class IV Section of Bliss Road with the DPW Director, Fire Chief and Police Chief,
- l. Lee will develop draft criteria and a selection process for a Conservation Person of the Year Award for the HCC to review.
- m. Matt reported that once the book "Nature's Best Hope Young Person's Edition", he will deliver copies to Town and school libraries.
- n. Matt and Mary Erdei will convey to the Planning Commission and Selectboard respectively the HCC's enthusiastic support for a Route 5 bicycle corridor improvements.

21. **HCC Member Terms**: Chris Beetham, (8/7/27) Sky Claud, (7/31/27) Mike Harris (8/7/27) Mary Hutchins, (10/30/27) Ted Levin (11/15/25) vice-chair Katie Mann (8/24/24). and chair Tom Kahl (8/24/24).