

Draft Minutes of the
Hartford Conservation Commission
January 6, 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 Karen Douville of the Linking Lands Alliance and Selectboard Liaison Alan Johnson.

A meeting of the Conservation Commission was held at the Hartford Town Hall located at 171 Bridge Street, White River Jct. on Monday, January 6, 2020. Tom Kahl called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

1. **Linking Lands Alliance Mapping:** Former longtime Hartford Conservation Commission member and Linking Lands Alliance member Karen Douville presented a series of natural resource and wildlife habitat and connectivity maps that were prepared with assistance from the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department. Karen noted that Linking Lands Alliance is a grassroots collaborative consisting of ten Vermont towns (Vershire, West Fairlee, Strafford, Thetford, Sharon, Norwich, Pomfret, Hartford, Woodstock and Hartland) that formed to address natural resource issues that transcend town boundaries. The focus of the Group has been on wildlife habitat and connectivity. Karen reported that the Linking Lands Alliance developed a program to work with local schools on wildlife habitat and connectivity. The program received funding from the Wellborn Ecology Fund and has expanded to include another 23 Vermont towns in the region. Karen noted that the maps are available on-line.
2. **Additions/Changes to the Agenda:** Tom Kahl asked if there are any changes or additions to the agenda. Matt Osborn suggested adding the VYCC Contract. The HCC agreed.
3. **Approval of Minutes:** Tom Kahl asked if there are any corrections to the Draft Minutes of December 2nd. Being none, Tom stated that the minutes are approved as written by unanimous consent.
4. **Developing a Comprehensive Town Forest Plan:** Angie Emerson reported that there is a need for a comprehensive document that consolidates all of the plans and studies that have been completed in the Town Forest. She envisions a notebook for cross-referencing with five sections. Angie's outline on the update was distributed. The HCC agreed that this is important and thanked Angie for volunteering to coordinate.
5. **Town Forest Recreation Management Plan:** Angie Emerson reported that the 2002 Recreation Management Plan needs to be updated and incorporated with the 2018 Town Forest Recreation Plan pilot project prior to presenting to the Selectboard. She submitted a list of her suggested changes and asked the Commission to submit comments to her by January 20th. Subsequently on January 7th, Matt sent the Commission members a Word file of the 2002 Plan, and as requested at the meeting on January 6th, Angie e-mailed a summary of the discussed solicited comments objectives.
6. **HCC 2020 Work Program:** Tom Kahl reviewed the 2019 Work Program. He noted that the major categories were conservation, recreation and education. The HCC came up with the following list of priorities:

Conservation:

1. Review of the Town Forest plans and inventories and create one unified document.
2. Private landowner conservation outreach.

3. Stream restoration and resiliency.
4. Invasive plant mitigation on Town conservation land.

Recreation:

1. Town Forest Trails Work including trails map updates and trail work days.
2. Contract with the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps for trails work in the Town Forest

Education:

1. HCC sponsored events (snowshoe outing, vernal pool walk & invasive plant outing)
2. Participate in the Hartford Community Coalition Block Party

The HCC agreed to review the Goals, Strategies, and Actions in Chapter IX, Natural Resources of the Hartford Town Plan and continue discussion at the February 3rd meeting.

7. Town Forest:

- a. Forest Management: Lee Michaelides noted that the forest management write-up has been updated. Jon Bouton noted that he discussed the schedule with A.J. Follensbee. There was discussion. Lee will incorporate some further comments into a revised forest management write-up. It was agreed to discuss forest management and timber harvesting with the Selectboard in February. Matt Osborn agreed to request getting on the Selectboard meeting agenda.
- b. Game of Logging: Tom Kahl reported that he received a request from Charles Reibel of the Hartford Area Career Technology Center Adult Education Program to host a chainsaw education class this spring. Approximately 12-15 trees will be cut. Angie Emerson made a motion to allow the Level One Game of Logging class to be held this spring in the Town Forest. The motion was seconded by Jon Bouton and approved. The HCC designated HCC members and foresters Jon Bouton or Dana Hazen to mark the trees to be cut. Tom Kahl will inform Charles Reibel of the HCC's decision. Dana Hazen volunteered to contact the Hartford Area Career Technology Center Natural Resources Class about cutting the trees into firewood to be donated.
- c. Trails Working Group or Trails Committee: Tom Kahl reported that a Steering Committee worked with staff and the consultant for the Town Forest Recreation Plan. Following completion of the Plan, a working group comprised of staff, two HCC members (Tom & Angie) and two Hartford trail enthusiasts (Bill Brown and Tim Schaal) worked on implementing the trails assessment. Tom asked if this arrangement should continue or possibly create a town trails committee? Matt Osborn suggested revisiting the HCC Bylaws to ensure that the HCC committees are up-to-date and meet today's issues. The HCC agreed. There was discussion and consensus to continue the working group arrangement. Angie Emerson indicated that she no longer wants to serve on the working group. Tom offered to replace Angie as chair of the working group. He asked if there are any other volunteers to join the working group. Katie Mann volunteered.
- d. Snowshoe Outing: Jon Bouton reported that in previous years the HCC has hosted an annual snowshoe outing in the Town Forest. He noted that he has volunteered to lead it in the past and offered to do it again this winter. The HCC agreed to hold the event on Sunday, February 16th from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Jon will invite County Forester A.J. Follensbee to attend.
- e. VYCC Work Crew: Matt Osborn reported that VYCC Conservation Operations Manager Jenn Seredejko will return to the Town Forest in April to flag the Pine Drop relocation. He said that the

crew could be assigned to Hartford in June, July or August. The HCC agreed that the priority should be July.

f. The discussion of blowing tree leaves from the HTF trails was delayed to the next meeting.

8. Bird Outreach: Tom Kahl reported that he was contacted by the Vermont Center for Ecostudies about working with them on a program to reach out to property owners of grasslands to improve bird habitat. Mary Hutchins volunteered to work with the Vermont Center for Ecostudies on the initiative.

9. David Change Conservation Area: Jon will be working with Mary on the design of perimeter signage. Dana Hazan will be contacting others for possible assistance in invasive plant control for this area.

10. Natural Resource Landowner Outreach: Katie Mann has revised outreach letters to the next 10 landowners on the 2016 Inventory Analysis. Because of meeting time limitations, it was decided to delay this discussion to the February meeting. Subsequent to this meeting on January 6th, Katie emailed all the HCC members links to her draft letters and maps for review prior to the February meeting.

11. Passing Lands Pop-up: Tom Kahl reported that he received interest from several folks about Passing Lands Pop-up, a forum for property owners with 30+ acres to meet one-on-one with land managers, conservation, financial and estate planning professionals to answer questions. Jon agreed to investigate the possibility of bringing the program to the Upper Valley.

12. Wetland Inventory: Matt Osborn reported that he contacted State Wetlands Biologist Rebecca Chalmers about coming to an upcoming HCC meeting to talk about wetlands and ideas about improving current wetlands mapping. Rebecca agreed to come to a HCC meeting. Matt also noted that Rebecca is updating an inventory of communities in Vermont with wetlands regulations. Matt agreed to follow-up on setting a date for Rebecca to come to a HCC meeting.

13. Stream Restoration: Katie Mann reported that a site visit to a Podunk Brook property with Greg Russ of the White River Partnership will be held on Wednesday, May 27th from 5:00-7:00 p.m. The HCC will meet at the West Hartford Library at 4:30 p.m.

14. Maanawaka Conservation Area: Tom Kahl reported that he helped Jon Bouton remove a downed tree on the Backwater Trail. Katie Mann reported that she removed a rifle target and trash from the Backwater Trail. She noted that a fire pit exists and should be removed in the spring.

15. HCC Award: Matt Osborn confirmed that he will discuss with Lori Hirshfield the status of Town approval of the HCC Stewardship award and possibility of erecting a plaque in the Town Hall. Although not discussed, as decided in December, Lee Michaaelides has agreed to prepare a write-up for the HCC Stewardship Award.

16. Announcements:

a. Tree Identification Workshop: Jon Bouton reported that a Tree Identification Workshop at Billings Museum is scheduled for Saturday, January 25th from 10:00 a.m. to Noon.

b. Logging to Trails Workshop: Jon Bouton reported that a Logging to Trails Workshop at Billings Museum is scheduled for Sunday, January 26th from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

17. Next Meeting: Tom Kahl noted that the next HCC meeting is scheduled for Monday, February 3rd.

18. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 9:19 p.m.

19. Meeting Action Items:

- a) Angie Emerson submitted a list of her suggested changes to the Town Forest Recreation Management Plan and asked the Commission to submit comments to her by January 20th
- b) The HCC agreed to continue discussion on the 2020 HCC Work Program at the February 3rd meeting.
- c) Lee Michaelides will update the HTF Forest Management Plan Update Summary to the latest comments.
- d) Matt Osborn agreed to request getting on a Selectboard Meeting agenda in February to discuss forest management and timber harvesting.
- e) Tom Kahl will inform the Charles Reibel the HCC approval for the Game of Logging in the HTF. Dana Hazen volunteered to contact the Hartford Area Career Technology Center Natural Resources Class about cutting downed trees from the Game of Logging event into firewood.
- f) The HCC agreed to revisit the HCC Bylaws.
- g) Jon Bouton will invite County Forester A.J. Follensbee to attend the Town Forest snowshoe outing.
- h) Mary Hutchins volunteered to work with the Vermont Center for Ecostudies on the bird outreach initiative.
- i) Jon Bouton to work on procuring perimeter signage for the David Chang Conservation Area.
- j) Dana Hazan is pursuing possible assistance for invasive plant control at the David Chang Conservation Area.
- k) HCC members to review the draft Owner Outreach letters and maps forwarded by Katie Mann before the February HCC meeting.
- l) Jon Bouton agreed to investigate the possibility of bringing the Passing Lands Pop-up Program to the Upper Valley.
- m) Matt Osborn agreed to follow-up on setting a date for Rebecca Chalmers to come to a HCC meeting to talk about wetlands.
- n) Matt Osborn will discuss with Lori Hirshfield the status of Town approval of the HCC Stewardship award and possibility of erecting a plaque in the Town Hall.
- o) Lee Michaelides to prepare a write-up for the HCC Stewardship Award.