

Hartland Conservation Commission Minutes of 2/12/2025 hybrid meeting

Attending: Commissioners Anderegg, Barney, Crosby, Hill, Moore, Nelson, and Waite.
Others in attendance: Dan Gottsegen, Tom Roberts, Jeremy Gray, Toni Vendetti, David Singer, Michelle Rielly, and Vicki Vakiener.

I. Meeting opened by Chairman Anderegg at 7:02 PM, followed by introductions for all who were present at Damon Hall or online at the time.

II. Minutes of January meeting--moved, seconded, no discussion, approved as submitted.

III. Treasurer's Report. Conservation Trust Account has \$10, 279.27. Operating Account is at \$1430, to last through June 30th. Paid since last meeting was renewed membership in Upper Valley Trails Alliance (UVTA) (\$100). If they are able to complete work at Summer Falls to shore up the end of one trail and block off a drop off area, it's likely to cost \$500. That charge may need to be put off until after July 1.

IV. Proposed Cell Tower--Discussion focused on conservation concerns, with additional information provided by landowners whose property abuts the proposed site. The company proposing the tower (ITW) will need to submit an application to the Public Utility Commission (PUC) to start the timing for public comment. There is a meeting on 2/18/25 with the Hartland Select Board, the Planning Commission, and company representatives, open to town residents, to gather townspeople's opinions and concerns. Since there will not be a PUC representative, comments at that forum will only be advisory to the Selectboard, and not formally entered as "public comment" for the purposes of PUC's review of the project.

Rob Anderegg summarized four areas of concern from a conservation perspective. 1) EMF radiation (Electromagnetic Frequency emitted by the operation of the cell tower) on wildlife. Many animals are more sensitive than humans to this range of radiation, and artificial signals can disrupt their functions and behavior. 2) Scenic resource--Commission has a duty to protect scenic resources--the proposed structure will tower above the treeline on a scenic rural route. 3) Impact of steps and structures that would allow construction and maintenance. proposed location is fairly close to a road, so may not need lots of excavation. 4) "Tower kill" of wildlife. Bats and birds can collide with or have their flights interfered with by tall standing structures, with or without lights.

Abutting landowners and Commissioners supplied additional information. The structure as proposed, will be low enough that it will not be required to have lighting for aircraft safety. While the proposed location is fairly close to the existing road, the detailed proposal provided to abutters notes that there will be construction of a road, as well as an 80 x 80 foot platform, and an 8 foot fence surrounding the tower. A number of trees are slated for removal to create this space and access, with potential impact on water flow and erosion. There is a vernal pool on one abutting property, and another has a spring-fed well, so local water flow disruption could have an impact. It is not known yet if any sensitive flora or fauna are on the site.

Attendees concurred that this tower has not been tasked with helping residential broadband access, nor has there been provisional information as to its potential as a relay station for emergency signals. It may not even have any confirmed commercial clients, as it may be proposed to construct "on spec", in the hopes that such clients can be arranged once it exists. At this juncture, there is no certain benefit to the town.

The PUC is aware of the proposal and has assigned it a case number. Abutters have submitted letters with their concerns. Chairman Anderegg will summarize the four areas of conservation concern outlined above, and will either submit it as a written comment to the Selectboard at the meeting on the 18th, or have a Commission member who is able to stay for the full meeting read it to the audience at that forum. That will be a hybrid meeting.

V. Goals for next year (July 2025-June 2026)

Goals lists were discussed briefly. The one page summary was approved with minor edits to be posted on the town website. Many thanks to Jennifer Waite for compiling both that one page bullet list, as well as the more detailed form which will help the commission track its progress during the year.

VI. *Nature's Best Hope--a book by Doug Tallamy*

Rob proposed to do a series of list serve posts about this book, which includes steps to take in one's own backyard to improve biodiversity on site. We might also purchase Doug's book to have at Old Home Days, to raffle off. Hartland Public Library has the book in paper and electronic formats.

Jennifer suggested we also publicize Home Grown National Park, a website that collates these steps, and can provide a user-friendly reference for steps manageable at the level of individual landscapes. On Facebook, there are connections to help people get their own yards and schoolyards certified as Home Grown National Parks.

Another local resource is Our Better Nature, written by Vermonters, with a forward by Doug Tallamy.

VII. Updates

A. Reappointments--no current Commissioners have terms that expire this year.

B. Openings on the Commission: there are two open seats. Rob reviewed the process for appointment: candidates submit an application via a form that is on the town website, candidates attend a Commission meeting to get a feel for our activities and see how they align with candidate interests, the Commission makes a recommendation to the Selectboard, and the Selectboard votes on whether to make the appointments. If more candidates apply than there are openings for, any candidate not appointed is encouraged to keep abreast of our activities and reapply when an opening occurs. Candidates must be Hartland residents.

C. Guide to Hartland's Public Spaces--Rob created a sample of items to be included in the write up of a site, to cover location, access and allowed or prohibited activities. He will circulate that to members. He encouraged commissioners to sign up for sites they have knowledge of, and to add to their working copies any questions that arise which may need further research, as this is still the information-gathering phase. Rob will create a list that can track which sites are already being worked on. Michelle

confirmed that we would be able to put links to our informational summaries on the Town website.

D. Conservation Award nominations--Last month's plan for the award appears appropriate to move forward. Jennifer will create the physical document, to be presented by Rob at Town Meeting.

E. Pohl Property--if all goes well, the closing will happen on February 19th or 20th. Upper Valley Land Trust featured the conservation initiative in their newsletter, so presumably are confident it will be completed. Phil Hobbe asked that we consider developing a trail system on the property for 4 seasons. The Land Trust covenant may already provide that they will be doing this, though we would certainly be able to assist.

F. Educational Presentations-- Hannah Dallas has agreed to repeat her EAB presentation on Zoom, so that it could be recorded to be available for later viewing. She will be available to do so later in the spring. Andy Scherer, the new Solid Waste Management District leader has agreed to present on recycling. Jennifer suggested attendees bring an item that has raised questions about how to safely recycle or dispose of it.

G. UVTA membership renewal--already done.

VIII. Other business.

A. Doug noted that new legislation regarding the authority for **legal trails** has been introduced, co-sponsored by local state senators Alison Clarkson and Becca White, among others. The Commission will seek more information about this.

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2026/Docs/BILLS/S-0004/S-0004%20As%20Introduced.pdf>

B. Town Meeting note: Michelle advised those present that in order to save the significant cost of mailing out a Warning about the Town Meeting (approx. \$1500), there will be no such mailing this year. An electronic Warning and all the information from the Town Report is available on the Town website. Written copies of the Town Report will be available in the Town Offices, likely by next week.

IX. Motion to adjourn at 8:12 PM, unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,
Tina Barney, Scribe