

Housatonic River Commission

“to coordinate on a regional basis the local management and protection of the Housatonic River Valley in northwestern Connecticut”

Minutes of the Special Meeting on December 12, 2023

at Cornwall Consolidated School (subject to approval at the next meeting) and via Google Meet

Christian Allyn – North Canaan – P
Jack Anstine – North Canaan – P
Matt Gallagher–Canaan (Falls Village)– A
Ellery Sinclair – Canaan (Falls Village)–P
Stacie Weiner – Salisbury – P
Gordon Whitbeck – Salisbury – P
Jim Saunders – Sharon – A

William R. Tingley, Chairman – Sharon – P
Phil Hart, Vice-chairman – Cornwall – P
Barton Jones – Cornwall – P
Jesse Klingebiel, Secretary – Kent – P
Pending new commissioner– Kent – A
Marc Andreotto, Treasurer – New Milford – P
Robert Gambino – New Milford – P

(Acronyms listed on the last page)

Also present were: Liz Lacy and Jackie Dias – NPS; Mike Jastremski, Rodrigo Pinto, and Julia Rogers – HVA; Andy Brydges and Brian Wood – FirstLight; Katie Freygang – HMPA; and Heidi Cunnick and Kent Fletcher – Housatonic Herbicide Working Group.

Mr. Tingley called the meeting to order at 7:09 p.m.

The minutes of the November 14, 2023 meeting were approved as written.

Treasurer's Report and NHCOC Financial Reports – Mr. Andreotto reported \$4,673.70 in the NHCOC-HRC subaccount. Of the initial transfer of \$37,500, \$22,500 remains in the federal funds subaccount at NHCOC.

Mr. Jones made a motion to approve the NHCOC invoice for \$3,500 for partial payment of 10% minimus NHCOC Personnel for financial record keeping, forms, and invoice payments. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Mr. Gambino made a motion to approve the OWL Labs quote for \$1,049 (less \$25 discount offer) for the purchase (from federal funds) of an OWL to use in hybrid meetings. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Mr. Gambino made a motion to approve the contract submitted by Susan Francisco for payments to be made Oct 2023 through Sep 2024 for Admin Assistant duties, along with invoices from October and November 2023. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Mr. Gambino made a motion to reimburse Susan Francisco \$309.98 for the purchase of a Chromebook and adapter to use in meetings (prior approval was given in September). The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Mr. Gambino made a motion to approve the contract for \$2,000 submitted by Julie Saxton for payments to be made from Oct 2023 through Sep 2024 for website design, editing, posting, and ongoing updates.

Communications

- Housatonic Meadows Preservation Action – Mr. Hart sent a letter to Katie Freygang thanking the HMPA for all the work they did at Housatonic Meadows State Park. It looks beautiful now.
- Shelley Harm, on behalf of the Salisbury Association, wrote asking for \$50K to help with the purchase of the Boyett property in Salisbury. That money is not in the HRC budget at this time.
- There is a 9:30 a.m. Zoom tomorrow with Laura Hart (Farmington River Watershed Association) to discuss expenses for the coming year. Ms. Lacy said that HRC needs to be working on the budget

as it needs to be finalized by February. Although circumstances for each group are different, each needs to have a workplan in place.

- Mr. Wood apologized for not informing the HRC earlier, and then explained a non-project use application that FirstLight has been working on with Eversource for a couple of years. Eversource wants to unify the large and small substations near the power plant in Falls Village. To upgrade the northwest Connecticut grid, substantial work needed to be done on the substation. FirstLight would like to see support from the River Commission. Mr. Wood pushed to get improved drainage and to remove invasive species (originally planted when the Appalachian Trail was established). They have an enhancement plan that involves native plantings with the right species. The comment period is through January 15.

Ms. Dias can look into arranging a site visit. Ms. Weiner, Mr. Allyn, Mr. Klingebiel, and Mr. Jastremski expressed interest.

Zoning Permit Applications for HRC review

- River Woods Subdivision (Honey Hill) – North Canaan

A formal application was only filed in late November, and then to the North Canaan HRC commissioner and not NHCOC, the appropriate recipient of applications. Mr. Allyn has been keeping up with all activities surrounding this site at the confluence of the Blackberry River and the Housatonic River down to the Canaan Dam. Mr. Tingley read a letter written by the HRC executive committee advising the withdrawal and resubmission of the application for the 20-lot subdivision.

The next North Canaan P&Z meeting and the supposed end of comment period is on January 9.

Comments: archaeological gold mine, no guarantee where houses would be situated, filtration not apparent.

HRC needs to come up with a list of comments and advice. It is very important to have local protections in place. Mr. Wood reported that FirstLight does own land abutting the proposed subdivision, and was not notified as required by statute.

Mr. Tingley emphasized that the HRC is not about stopping the project but making sure that it is less impactful and that the river is protected.

Ms. Rogers noted that she has reviewed this subdivision request and that the houses and septic systems that are shown on the plans that were submitted are just conceptual. In theory, the houses and driveways will be decided by individual owners. The construction of the road is distinctly different from the development of the houses. She has not seen thorough sedimentation and erosion control plans as they relate to road construction.

It would be possible to hire an outside entity so that engineering regulations and all aspects of the subdivision could be reviewed by experts.

Section 7 of Wild & Scenic – presentation – tabled to January

Workplan Project Status:

Ms. Lacy explained the benefits of putting together a list of items and having a “champion” who is most interested and able to be involved with each project. This process will help devise project frameworks.

- Invasive Plant Management - Contractor for 10,000? Mapping updates are needed. Mr. Gambino and Mr. Allyn will work on it.

- Visitor Use Management – Visitor use management will be reported by HVA and they can come up with spending plans for the \$23K remaining.
- Update Management Plan – contract needed for HVA mapping
- Website Improvements – Mr. Tingley is in contact with the logo designer
- Access Survey and Recommendations – contract with HVA needed. Mr. Jones will work on this.
- Ruggles landing Site Plan – contract needed. Mr. Tingley will work on this.
- Organizational Development – funds for supplies and technology.
- Program Coordinator – contract with HVA and contractor needed. Under control.
- Stormwater/Stream Crossing Surveys – contract needed. It could be an HVA project. Needs a concept proposal to lay the groundwork.
- Educational Programs –
 - Signage - contract needed. Ms. Weiner and Mr. Allyn will determine where signage should be located (there are standards set by the NPS). They will determine crossings and where signs would be noticed. This will involve contacting the DOT.

Ongoing Resource Issues reports:

- Housatonic Railroad and Housatonic Herbicide Working Group – Mr. Sinclair and the Housatonic Herbicide Working Group.

Members of the group, Heidi Cunnick and Kent Fletcher addressed the HRC. Ms. Cunnick presented a brief history of the group and explained where they stand now. The HHWG was formed two years ago to encourage the Housatonic Railroad to use best practices regarding vegetation management plans, which would preferably be in line with those of Massachusetts when treating vegetation along the tracks. They have representation from New Milford, Kent, Cornwall, Canaan/Falls Village, North Canaan, and Salisbury. She emphasized that there was no antagonism towards the railroad, but that they had experienced complete resistance from the railroad. Their primary goals are to support towns to have the railroad treat area zones as identified in the Connecticut database and to ask for ongoing support from the HRC. If they have a meeting with a state representative, it would be helpful to have an HRC representative attend.

Ms. Cunnick detailed the many activities/meetings that members of the group have participated in. They continue to review scientific literature related to herbicides and their effects.

Currently the railroad is required to give 21 days' advance notification of spraying. She explained that in Massachusetts it's far less complicated. No-spray zones are identified and the tracks are coded with markers.

- Housatonic Meadows State Park - HMSP

Katie Freygang thanked the HRC for their support. The group feels that their part in recovery is coming to a close. A small group will continue monitoring and will keep communicating with HRC members. Wood from the felled oaks is slated to become picnic tables at the park. Mr. Tingley appreciates on behalf of the HRC all the work that the group has done.

- Gaylordsville – stone dumping in the river – Ms. Lacy expressed her frustration in not hearing from people she has contacted regarding the issue, such as the Connecticut Army Corps. A suggestion was made to get a drone to take photos. Mr. Gambino will send Ms. Lacy any photos he has of the problem area.

It was noted that funding is in place to hire consultants/experts to do things such as project proposal reviews, reconnaissance work, monitoring water quality, and more.

- GE Settlement/PCBs

HRC Member Updates:

- NHCOG – no report
- NPS – Ms. Lacy explained that she is the agreements technical representative and that Ms. Dias will be taking on more of that role.
- HVA – no report
- CT DEEP – no report
- FirstLight – no report

New Business

Mr. Tingley said that just short of 10 applications have come in for the Wild & Scenic River Program Coordinator/Conservation Grant Manager position and that he and Lynn Werner (HVA) have been reviewing and interviewing some candidates via Zoom and in person. They are hopeful that the shared position will be filled by the end of the year.

Mr. Tingley got permission to hold the July 2024 HRC meeting in the new Hotchkiss Library (in Sharon) meeting room.

Mutual Concerns & Future Agenda Items

Mr. Gambino commented that New Milford had issues with subdivisions in the past and that more are bound to come along. Wetlands and zoning commissions will be seeing more activity.

Mr. Allyn noted that he has been a commissioner for 10 years. He intends to be involved with the Blackberry River Protection Alliance which he hopes will help in North Canaan as far as land trusts and zoning regulations go. Ms. Lacy commented on the importance of working with land trusts to further land protection.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:58 p.m.

Recording Secretary,



Susan Francisco

Next regular meeting – January 9, 2024

[Housatonic River Commission - \(weebly.com\)](https://www.housatonicrivercommission.com)

BLEC – Berkshire Litchfield
Environmental Council
CCC – Citizens Coordinating Council
DEEP – Department of Energy and
Environmental Protection
DOT – Department of Transportation
EPA – Environmental Protection Agency
FERC - Federal Energy Regulatory
Commission
GE – General Electric

H.E.A.L. – Housatonic Environmental
Action League
HMPA – Housatonic Meadows Preservation
Action
HHWG – Housatonic Herbicide Working
Group
HMSP – Housatonic Meadows State Park
HRC – Housatonic River Commission
HVA – Housatonic Valley Association

JKW – Japanese Knotweed
NCD – Northwest Conservation District
NHCOG – Northwest Hills Council of
Governments
NPS – National Park Service
RIO - River Information and Outreach
W&S – Wild and Scenic
ZEO –Zoning Enforcement Off