



**City of Keene, New Hampshire**

**Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Subcommittee**

**Friday, October 8, 2021**

**8:30 AM**

**2<sup>nd</sup> fl Conference Room, City Hall**

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**Subcommittee Members**

**Members Present:**

Thomas P. Haynes, Chair  
Art Walker  
Mike Davern  
Brian McBeairy

**Members Not Present:**

Corinne Marcou, Administrative Assist.  
Steven Bill

**Staff Present:**

Rhett Lamb, Community Development Director/ACM

1. Minutes – August 12, 2021 meeting

Motion to accept the August minutes was unanimous.

2. Membership:

Chair Haynes explained how the Conservation Commission, in 2019, hired an outside consultant to craft the current Stewardship Plan. With the recommendation to form a subcommittee, it was tasked with the Conservation Commission. The three Conservation Commission members, Chair Haynes, Mr. Walker and Mr. Bill, along with other outside community members such as Mr. McBeairy, form this subcommittee, which will guide the Stewardship Plan forward. This subcommittee has recently begun this process. Mr. Lamb stated that the Stewardship Plan contains a lot of information and it is this subcommittee's task to disseminate this information into workable, accomplishable tasks. Mr. Bohannon joined the meeting.

Chair Haynes mentioned that there would be at least one more member join the Committee, possibly an engaged community member, though it would be good to keep the Committee small and more manageable. He suggested for recommendations be brought forward for consideration.

3. Discussion Items

Chair Haynes asked if Mr. McBeairy had time to review the Stewardship Plan to list his priorities. Mr. McBeairy stated that as a user of the Goose Pond area, he has seen the destruction the multiple mud seasons can do to a trail with numerous users walking the trails and as they avoid puddles, they inadvertently widen the trail, destroying the ecosystem. He further stated that from a conservation standpoint, this is the reason why he has joined the Committee, to assist in creating dedicated trails that individuals follow.

Mr. McBeairy continued that other priorities of importance include educational kiosks/signs on the trails describing the ecosystem to users, specifically children/students.

Chair Haynes described how he had reviewed the previously compiled list to tally the member's priorities. He stated that under the Community Outreach and Education piece, the top choices include, increase/install kiosks, maps and signage, and surveying users. Under the Recreational Trails Stewardship, the top choices include, improve signage and trail blazing, trail maintenance and coordinating the trails for multiple users and creating a trail maintenance program. Wildlife Habitat and Forest Stewardship include planning and surveying, as well as how to accomplish these tasks, which will be an ongoing process.

Chair Haynes continued that this exercise states the main priorities include trails and educating the public on how to use them. He then asked for any comments from the members. Mr. Bohannon stated that the timing for these projects is on target with funds coming forward in July 2022, from the City's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The details on these funds would be used as seed money in applying to grants, which require a City match in funds. He requested thought be given to a specific project wanting to accomplish, put a figure to it with details outlining the project which can be leveraged through a grant and some City funds. Mr. Bohannon suggested the process of writing this grant request to the Recreational Trails Program to begin in the early spring, March-April, 2022 for a submitting date of early May.

Chair Haynes asked for suggestions/thoughts on the kiosks and trail maps moving forward. Mr. Walker contributed that it seems that all of these priorities are integrated. He further questioned if they would concentrate on one specific section of the trails initially in creating signage or would they create a master plan of the existing trails, and then build signage based from the plan. Chair Haynes stated that there were many who suggested trails maintenance as a priority, and ask Mr. Davern what the NEMBA maintenance plans entails. Mr. Davern stated that there is nothing formal; except for mental notes of problem areas, they address as time and money allow from their small group of volunteers. He did state that some of these areas don't always align with what is best overall, such as the back side of the loop around the pond. This area isn't a high concern for NEMBA as that is a section more for hikers, though it does need attention, which could be something a larger group could attend to with their help. One fall project they will focus on is to replace some bridges, as they are old and unsafe. Mr. Lamb mentioned that there are trails for multiple and specific users, which will need to be recognized if there was a maintenance agenda. It will be important to consider the dynamics of users when developing a plan for grant applications. Mr. Lamb stated that this would be a great project for the Committee as there are a number of members who use the trails on a regular basis as well as utilizing a filtering process to compile the information. Mr. Davern mentioned that the loop around the pond is one of the most used trails and the trail on the north side across the old carriage path section is starting to show excess wear. He continued that these areas are known to be needing work, would be noticed by the public and would be the highest gain from their attention as a larger majority of the public would see these sections.

Mr. Davern mentioned that the new Executive Director of NEMBA has been excellent at sharing grant opportunities with chapters. Some of these grants are not specific to mountain biking but for trail maintenance, and outdoor recreation, which would be good to review. He offered to work with Mr. Bohannon and his staff on these and other grants proposals. Mr. Bohannon clarified that with the CIP process, the GGPFSP was postponed for other priorities. Moving forward to next fiscal year, with this Committee created, and a possible plan and grant to present, it can be presented for funding. He agreed that the pond loop is vital for maintenance as is others that get used the most first, then move to other trails in the future. He continued that he could apply for another grant, which he plans to annually. Mr. Lamb stated that the work Mr. Bohannon is doing is vital in the ongoing maintenance of the City trails; a project the City began 25 years ago. Some of these trails are at the end of their life span and need attention. He continued that the importance of presenting this information to the City Council to preserve the trails and pedestrian footbridges. Mr. Walker mentioned that specific trails and footbridges in Massachusetts he's walked, the bridges are not made of wood, but are made of steel beams. These may not be as aesthetically pleasing, but they do last longer. Mr. Lamb stated, on a bigger perspective that the surface of the south bridge that was built by DOT, over Route 101, which was made with concrete, is falling apart. The planks still do need to be replaced, which is what Mr. Bohannon is addressing.

Mr. Davern stated that NEMBA has inventoried the bridges at Goose Pond and Drummer Hill, as a member who wasn't working during lockdown completed the project. This information and pictures are

what is driving their projects moving forward. The deck boards will be replaced with rough-cut Hemlock instead of pressure treated wood planks. Chair Haynes asked about this data and Mr. Davern stated he would share that with the Committee as a starting point in prioritizing projects. Mr. Walker questioned how long a wooden bridge lasts. Mr. Davern responded that it depends on the location, and the materials used in construction. He stated that they have volunteers who will donate lumber and time with no consistent design for the bridges. Chair Haynes stated that the Stewardship Plan does have a recommended type of wood for bridge construction; for reference, this will be reviewed and considered if there are funds moving forward.

Chair Haynes asked Mr. Bohannon a trail maintenance plan would be helpful for him and his staff. In his response, Mr. Bohannon stated a prioritized list would be very helpful in applying for grants and cost estimating. As for staff, he doesn't have the capacity for the work to get done. He would rely on either volunteers or if the project receives funding, would be outsourced. Items to remember and suggestions in who to consider for the maintenance would be utilizing local trail builders, such as Lou Shelly who has done a lot of work in the area. Mr. Davern mentioned that he knows Mr. Shelly and knows he would like to work with the City in giving back to the community. He continued that there are many trail builders in the area but they are booked for a long time and it may be difficult to hire someone.

Mr. Lamb stated that what would be most useful for Mr. Bohannon is to prioritize, with an understanding of the costs, which could be presented to City Council. Chair Haynes stated that if there was a master plan in place, it may hold favor when applying for grants as it expresses a commitment by the City. The next question by Chair Haynes is how to go about creating a plan, knowing that there is the Stewardship Plan, which needs to be reviewed for their recommendations. It is known that the loop around the pond is in the most need of attention, Chair Haynes stated there is more to the area than simply the loop, but still will need prioritizing. From there, the users can be addressed, then the signage and maps that guide the users. Having never created a plan such as this, Chair Haynes questioned what would be the next steps and what would take priority.

Mr. Walker questioned that funds would be available in July 2022, with Mr. Bohannon confirming but the information to write the grant would be needed by the end of March. Chair Haynes stated that beginning now to then, is when the information will need to be crafted. Mr. Walker questioned if a tier system would work with outlining the plan. Mr. Davern suggested beginning with the main arteries into the park, then focus on the loop around the pond. Secondly, he would move to the main entrances to the trails the public use then move out towards the lesser used trails, which may be the trails NEMBA is maintaining. Mr. Bohannon agrees, stating that the Green Acres and the Drummer Hill entrances see a lot of activity, which could use some attention. Mr. Lamb suggested a review of the Stewardship Plan, as it was created in 2018, which is very detailed and can provide a lot of information they are looking for. He continued that a review of the introduction, which outlines some of the suggestions then, at the next meeting the Committee could conduct a walk-thru. He further mentions the organization of the plan and the respect to the members of the public who gave their time to use as a foundation moving forward. Chair Haynes stated that would be one of the tasks assigned to the members; to review the plan with Mr. Lamb stating the latter part of the Plan is the section to review.

Chair Haynes questioned if the kiosks, signage and the trail mapping part of this process in an attempt to help the users. Mr. Bohannon stated that there is a kiosk that will be installed, later this fall, on the maintenance road out toward the dike. He stated this kiosk would have a small overhang, a bench and a section for maps and information. Chair Haynes stated he questions what information will be shared on the kiosks and requests the members to keep that in mind.

Chair Haynes continued that it seems that the Committee is narrowing their focus with the trail network, establishing a trail system, and support with kiosks and maps. He further questions what would be the next steps to continue moving forward with this focus. Mr. Bohannon stated that creating the priority list from the Plan, which outlined the areas of concern and build from there. He stated that the other aspects would expand, with patience, as the Committee works through the first steps.

Chair Haynes stated that he would like to see this Committee's work gather a group of community volunteers to assist in the smaller, more manageable, specific maintenance projects. This would be

an avenue that the Committee can engage the community, to build the support needed. Mr. Bohannon stated that there were some projects completed by Boy Scouts who were doing their Eagle Scout projects. He continued that there is an active, growing group of Boy Scouts in Keene, who may be willing to participate in completing these projects with some training. Mr. Davern stated a large obstacle for some projects is the moving of materials to the work site and this could be an area the Boy Scouts can help with, as access isn't always as easy. Chair Haynes stated that there are members of the public who would like to contribute some time to maintenance as a way of giving back to the trails they use. Mr. Davern stated that having a dedicated person who can organize the work, someone who understands the requirements and to train those volunteers would be a benefit. Chair Haynes suggested that this idea could easily be brought into the Conservation Commission planned seasonal walks.

Mr. Davern questioned if it would be a possibility of having a part-time trail steward for the Keene area as he has seen in other areas such as Vermont. Mr. Bohannon has stated that he likes the idea but the Parks & Recreation Department has traditionally been focused on getting the ball fields and swimming pools ready for the summer months, but not the trails, and rain gardens. Mr. Bohannon did state that the City Manager has heard the message of needing more personnel with a recent hire and the hopes of another soon. He stated he would like to create a narrative of what that position would entail. Chair Haynes questioned what that vision would be, either full-time or part-time. Mr. Bohannon answered he would like to see it full-time as the City needs to take better care of our trails to make this a destination area. He feels the rail corridor is an attraction, but we don't currently know it though there is a study being conducted currently. Mr. Davern and Mr. Bohannon agreed that volunteers are not sustainable to trail maintenance if there is an increase to the trail usage.

Chair Haynes offered time to Mr. Davern to review the Brattleboro NEMBA Chapter trailhead counter report. NEMBA was awarded a grant for two people counters in early August in the Drummer Hill/Greater Goose Pond Forest. He stated that he moved the two every two weeks to different sites, making it eight sites over the past weeks. He did state that we do know the heavy used areas, such as East Surry Rd. What stood out the most to Mr. Davern is the number of people counted; the total number of users was close to 3,300. This count was from the locations the counters were stationed, with not all entrances manned with counters, which would have drawn a larger number. He continued reviewing the report, but questioned how best to use the information. He questioned using the report to improve an underused trailhead to redirect traffic, or to move users away from residential areas. One item he mentioned is that at times it may seem that the park is being used, but that all trailheads may seem that it isn't. Mr. Bohannon did mention that the East Surry Road neighborhood would be happier with a moved trailhead. Chair Haynes stated that the area is so large, that as a user, you may not see others. One balance to consider is that any added amenities that may be added, could draw more people, making it not as an experience as it is currently. Another balance is to consider the diversity of the area, and the diversity of the users.

Mr. Davern questioned if there were other areas the Committee would like to see counted, as he has hit the highlights. Mr. Lamb suggested any internal, key intersections of trails could be counted. Mr. Bohannon would be interested in the number of people using the recently built maintenance trail by the dike, for those who did not want to go all around and could simply go up and back. Mr. Davern stated that it might interested to count users who may not hike the full loop.

4. Adjournment – Chair Haynes adjourned the meeting at 9:40 am. Next meeting, December 10, 2021