

City of Keene  
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, April 17, 2017

4:30 PM 2nd Floor Conference Room,  
Hall

City

**Members Present:**

Thomas P. Haynes, Chair  
Councilor Jan Manwaring  
Denise Burchsted  
Andrew Madison (left at 5:40 PM)  
Eloise Clark, Alternate  
Sparky Von Plinsky IV, Alternate

**Staff Present:**

**Members Not Present:**

Sadie Butler, Vice Chair  
Councilor George Hansel  
Brian Reilly

**1) Call to Order**

Chair Haynes called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM.

**2) Minutes – March 20, 2017**

On page five of six, the minutes indicate Ms. Clark will speak to the Ashuelot River Park Advisory Committee. This should be corrected to say Ms. Clark will speak with the Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee (ARLAC), of which she is a member.

Mr. Madison made a motion to approve the minutes of March 20, 2017 as amended, which was seconded by Councilor Manwaring and carried unanimously.

**3) Communication and Notifications**

**a. Hillside Village Proposed Wetland Permit Update**

Chair Haynes welcomed Jim Phippard for an update on Hillside Village. Mr. Phippard provided an update on their wetland permitting process. He said a Memorandum of Agreement has been implemented between the State of New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Keene Heritage Commission. This Agreement is a requirement of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. It addresses mitigation for the impact to historic resources on the property.

Mr. Phippard noted that the Wetlands Permit also requires mitigation. Hillside village has proposed to place parts of the property under conservation easement and initially asked the City to be the holder of this easement. This Commission recommended that Hillside Village instead approach the Monadnock Conservancy. While Mr. Phippard did not initially think the Conservancy would be interested in such an isolated, small area, the Conservancy is interested in the possibility. The Conservancy has agreed to review the property for its conservation features, particularly the link to agriculture that qualified the property for the Federal Historic Registry.

Review of the property will likely be completed by October 2017. If the Conservancy does not accept the easement, there will be another provision to allow a deed restriction on the property that stays with the land as a condition of the wetlands permit, leaving NH Department of Environmental Services (DES) responsible for monitoring and enforcement. Mr. Phippard anticipated the wetlands permit being issued by this meeting date, but it has not yet been issued.

Mr. Phippard anticipates ground breaking on the site on May 15. Hillside Village has until October to comply with the wetlands permit. He anticipates active construction for 22 months, during which time the Commission is welcome to visit.

**4) Wantastiquet-Monadnock Hiking Trail Extension Coordinating**

Chair Haynes welcomed Tom Duston, Chair of the Chesterfield Conservation Commission and member of the Lands Committee of the Monadnock Conservancy. Mr. Duston began by commenting on Hillside Village. He said it was interesting to hear about because of his work for the Conservancy. He said the Lands Committee will review the property and make recommendations that will eventually be voted on by the Board of Trustees.

Mr. Duston continued, stating that both organizations he is a part of are partners on the Monadnock Trail. This trail currently spans from Brattleboro to Keene (ending at the Daniels Hill Road trailhead of the Horatio Colony Nature Preserve). The goal of this project, since it began in the 1990s, is to extend the trail from Mt. Wantastiquet in Brattleboro to Mt. Monadnock. The connection between the trailhead at Pisgah State Park and Keene was completed quickly. He said the easiest way to hike to Mt. Monadnock from Keene is to use the bike path and continue on the rail line to the Troy/Metacomet-Monadnock Trail. He has permission to use the bike path and rail line and complete that section to Mt. Monadnock within the year.

Mr. Duston continued that the project is moving smoothly right now. He wished to speak to the Commission as a part of his effort to initiate a Monadnock Trail Coordinating Committee. He envisions this Committee including the stewards of each part of the trail. These stakeholders will continue monitoring and maintaining their parts of the trail, but there will be common signage, etc. throughout. He has spoken with most of the potential partners (Antioch, Keene Parks & Rec, Friends of Pisgah, Chesterfield and Troy Conservation Commissions, and the Monadnock Conservancy, etc.) and received a lot of interest. He only envisions this Committee meeting two or three times per year.

The first meeting of the Monadnock Trail Coordinating Committee will be Tuesday, May 2, at 4:00 PM at the Railroad Senior Housing Community Room next to the Co-Op. He hopes one or more members of the Keene Conservation Commission will attend and participate on this Committee.

Chair Haynes asked where the link is between the Horatio Colony Nature Preserve and the bike path. Mr. Duston replied the current idea is to cross NH Route 9 at Ash Brook, using large culvert built by the State for pedestrian passage. An alternative route is from the current rail trail across Ash Brook adjacent to the Monadnock Marketplace and under NH Route 9 to conservation easement lands on West Hill. From the bike bath, the trail would continue down Marlboro Street to the rail trail, where the State is considering putting a bridge over Route 101 to connect to the stone arch bridge. There are questions about the rail trail in Swanzey that Mr. Duston is exploring.

Mr. Duston welcomed Commission members to the first Coordination Committee meeting and welcomed questions via email. The Commission will keep Mr. Duston updated on ability to attend the meeting/participate on the Committee.

**5) Ashuelot River Wildlife Corridor Presentation**

Dr. Burchsted introduced three of her Keene State College (KSC) students working on their environmental studies senior projects – Michelle Andrzejewski, Meghan O’Dwyer, and Sam Nickerson.

Mr. Nickerson explained they have been working on this project since January. He displayed a photo, taken by Dr. Ken Bergman, of a bobcat walking along the frozen Ashuelot River in 2015. Dr. Bergman has used bait to capture wildlife on camera for the past several winters leading to an inventory of animals in the area.

Mr. Nickerson displayed a map the students created using the Keene Wildlife Action Plan. There is a lot of high quality habitat north and south of Keene, yet a lot of developed, lower quality habitat in Keene. To the students, however, it seems the Ashuelot River is a corridor connecting those high quality habitats through Keene.

Ms. O’Dwyer presented their research question: What is the likelihood that the Ashuelot River is being used as a wildlife corridor and how can greenway planning facilitate the movement of wildlife? She continued explaining their methods:

- Developed site quality standards based on spatial distances from a road crossing
  - Low Quality Habitat: within 150 yards of a road crossing
  - Medium Quality Habitat: 150-500 yards from a road crossing
  - High Quality Habitat: more than 500 yards from a road crossing
- Wildlife Cameras at all sites along Route 101

Ms. O’Dwyer continued displaying photos of animals captured in the different zones:

- Low Quality Habitat: fox, raccoon, beaver
- Medium Quality Habitat: fox, beaver

Mr. Nickerson continued that contrary to what they expected, the highest animal sighting/diversity/intensity was closest to the road. Based on these results they believe NH Route 101 may be a major barrier for animals. Animals may also be attracted to these developed areas because of trash, littering, etc. The students are working to analyze the data and interpret the results. They asked the Commission a series of questions to aid their analysis.

*1. What is the Commission’s perspective on overcoming these development barriers (roads, etc.) for conservation?*

Recalling the temporal scale of the study, Mr. Nickerson noted more animals were captured on camera as the area transitioned from winter to spring. Mr. Von Plinsky said it seems as though NH Route 101 is a wildlife dam; he cautioned, however, that even if NH Route 101 is eliminated as a barrier, the problem will just shift to a new area of development. He does not know, with development as it stands, if the Ashuelot River is a sufficient corridor. Ms. Clark asked if the students were considering tunnels under the roads. Mr. Nickerson replied that is an option and added that road signs educating the public would be a step forward. Ms. Clark asked if they collected data to compare to road kills. While Mr. Nickerson noted that was not possible during the time frame of the study, Ms. O’Dwyer noted that is an opportunity for further research. Mr. Madison questioned the potential impact of the new pedestrian bridge over Route 101. Mr. Nickerson replied it is possible animals could use that bridge at night and it would be interesting

to place wildlife cameras there. Ms. O'Dwyer added that because they studied along river banks, it is hard for them to make that inference. Chair Haynes asked if the river froze this year and Mr. Nickerson replied only briefly. Chair Haynes replied each year may be different depending on the conditions. Mr. Nickerson added that Dr. Bergman also uses bait, which may be attracting animals to the river; still, in this study no bait was used and results were captured. Councilor Manwaring suggested a similar project on Beaver Brook, which has the advantage of being adjacent to Beech Hill, which this Commission is concerned with protecting.

2. *What are the feasible options and opportunities for a greenway/ conservation along the Ashuelot River; are there any other documents the Commission suggests for review?*

To provide context for this question, Ms. Andrzejewski explained resources she used to research animal greenways (part two of the research question):

- Land Conservation Plan for the Ashuelot River – emphasizes wildlife habitat, wetlands, productive forests, and recreational resources
  - Major concerns: protecting resources like wetlands, fragmented forest, farmlands
  - Goals: identify high priority parcels to possibly purchase or donate for easement, more outreach and education on the importance of certain areas to be conserved
- ARLAC – plan to protect river and riparian land for ecological and social values
  - Major concerns: loss of riparian forest as a management issue
  - Goal: to retain and rehabilitate forested riparian wetlands

Ms. Andrzejewski continued that she also interviewed stakeholders:

- Jo Beth Mullens (KSC)
- Barbara Skully (ARLAC)

She continued that an important part of this project was mapping. She displayed Google Earth images to demonstrate the major wildlife barriers in Keene and the lack of parcels in conservation in developed Keene. She reported her main findings are the need to restore riparian zones in Downtown Keene, identify high priority parcels in Keene, and increase public outreach and education. Ms. Andrzejewski welcomed responses to question two from the Commission.

Mr. Von Plinsky noted the Commission is working toward a Conservation Master Plan that would encompass a lot of the foci in this study. He said looking at the map presented, the situation is not as dire as it could be, despite not being easy to improve. He encouraged the students to stay updated on the pending Conservation Master Plan. Dr. Burchsted added that Ms. Andrzejewski's research may be able to contribute to the Master Plan. Chair Haynes agreed it is a question of feasibility of solving a difficult problem and while he did not have an answer to that question he was grateful for the students work.

Councilor Manwaring said a greenway is an enormous effort and she is unsure that Keene or this Commission are ready for that. Chair Haynes agreed that getting the Commission's goals for Keene into a working document is difficult. Councilor Manwaring added there are complications and legal barriers to identifying high priority parcels; the City owns a large part of Beech Hill but it is still unprotected, only zoned as conservation. Dr. Burchsted asked Chair Haynes his conservation goals for Keene. He replied, to know the value of corridors for wildlife, aesthetics, recreation, etc. He said Keene is fortunate to have the bike path, which also facilitates these things. He is unsure how feasible corridors are in Keene with development.

Ms. Clark noted the Friends of Open Spaces have had Mill Stream on their to do list, which used to flow under the Colony Mill and was rehabilitated in the last ten years. She said it could be a

good connection to the Ashuelot River for wildlife. This land is owned privately by the abutters to the west and by Eversource to the east. Chair Haynes echoed that idea and noted that even though some obstacles seem impossible, creativity can help overcome them. Mr. Von Plinsky suggested the students see the work of Jack Ahern at the University of Massachusetts, which is very similar to theirs; he noted he could be influential for the Commission as well. Councilor Manwaring suggested it would also be interesting to assess the impact of the Dark Skies initiative on corridors.

The Commission thanked the students for their presentation and look forward to seeing the final product. Dr. Burchsted invited Commission members to the final poster presentation Thursday, May 4 from 1:30-3:00 PM. There will be other presentations that may be relevant to the Commission. Ms. Burchsted will send the information to Ms. Kessler.

**6) Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Plan RFQ Update**

Chair Haynes reported that he presented the request for funds for Goose Pond stewardship to the Finance, Organization, and Personnel (FOP) Committee. The FOP voted yes to send the request to City Council on April 20. If all goes well, Council will approve the request and the RFQ can be advertised. At the May meeting, the Commission will form a working group for this effort.

**7) Development of an Aquatic Resource Mitigation Local Priority List**

Dr. Burchsted reported on her conversation with Lori Sommer of NH DES, who oversees the ARM fund. Ms. Sommer shared their project evaluation sheet and mitigation priority list used to review applications. At the last meeting, the Commission discussed enhancing lands in Keene already in conservation (from the forest down); she said while that makes sense, the ARM fund is seeking projects that enhance aquatic resources and benefit the forest (from the water up). Dr. Burchsted shared the ARM fund primary ranking criteria for applications:

- Project restores, enhances or retains *wetland types* (NWI) and/or wetland functions & values that were lost in the HUC 8 watershed
  - Ms. Clark noted this is how the cemetery project was funded
- Project restores, enhances or provides a *stream passage improvement* that is similar to stream and riparian habitat lost in the service area.
- Overall Environmental Significance
  - Dr. Burchsted suggested revisiting the Wildlife Action Plan to identify high quality habitat in lands already in conservation in Keene
- Overall aquatic resource mitigation potential
- Proximity/Connectivity
  - Conserving new space and building connections to lands already in conservation
- Cost-Effectiveness and Partnership Potential
  - In-kind contributions, City support, etc.

Dr. Burchsted said Ms. Sommer suggested the Wildlife Action Plan as a good place to start identifying where to begin connecting high priority habitats. Ms. Sommer also sent a sample priority list (shared with members via email) and suggested the Commission create a portfolio of: potential projects, conceptual plans and necessary permits, a timeline for acquiring permits, preliminary approval of regulatory agencies, and design documents for each project; following those steps qualify a project as shovel-ready. Dr. Burchsted encouraged pursuing these funds as an opportunity for riparian restoration in Keene, especially on Beaver Brook. She thinks the greatest damage the City is doing is through flood management and echoed the need to restore natural flooding processes. Councilor Manwaring noted there was confusion about a task at the last meeting that called for her to look into flood history. Mr. Madison recalled that was for

hundred year or greater floods and Councilor Manwaring agreed to prepare those materials for the May meeting.

Dr. Burchsted suggested creating a working group to work on this priority list, beginning with mapping priority wetlands from the Wildlife Action Plan. Mr. Madison and Mr. Von Plinsky offered to assist in map-making. Chair Haynes noted the need to ask Ms. Kessler if 24 hour notice is required for working groups. Dr. Burchsted, Councilor Manwaring, and Mr. Von Plinsky were in favor of Tuesday afternoon meetings. Confirmation of the meeting date and time will be sent by Ms. Kessler via email.

**8) Conservation Master Plan Retreat Discussion**

Chair Haynes reported that he contacted Jeff Littleton of Moosewood Ecological to ask his willingness to lead a retreat to work through the goals and priorities the Commission wants to accomplish with the Master Plan. As of the time of this meeting, Chair Haynes had not yet received a response but he is optimistic. Chair Haynes noted he had not contacted Jeff Littleton at that point, but asked Commission members, without knowing Mr. Littleton's availability, if they are still interested in such a retreat. All Commission members present agreed they are interested. Chair Haynes noted in the past they have scheduled the retreat in the evening following Commission meetings over dinner. Ms. Clark suggested approaching Amanda Littleton, if Mr. Littleton is not available, as she has many resources. She added there were excellent facilitators when she was on the Commission last and she will try to find their names; she also suggested Barbara Richter. Mr. Von Plinsky suggested looking at the Conservation Master Plans from Steamboat Springs and Fort Collins, CO. Chair Haynes recalled the NH Association of Conservation Commissions also has the master plans for various towns listed. He added the person who facilitates this workshop will be paid for their time.

**9) Staff Updates**

**10) New or Other Business**

Ms. Clark noted she is the Commission liaison for Friends of Open Space. The Friends are moving forward with an exciting project – a building was removed at Church and Carpenter Streets due to flood damage. The 0.26 acres, with the support of Andy Bohannon, Director of Parks, Recreation & Facilities, will be repurposed as an open space with benches and planters, etc. The Friends also hope to recruit Michele Chalice, who has a background in landscape architecture, to help.

**11) Adjournment – Next meeting date Monday, May 15, 2017**

Hearing no further business, Chair Haynes adjourned the meeting at 5:53 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,  
Tara Kessler, Planner