

**ADOPTED**

**City of Keene**  
**New Hampshire**

**CONSERVATION COMMISSION**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Monday, April 18, 2016**

**4:30 PM**

**2nd Floor Conference Room, City Hall**

**Members Present:**

Chair Thomas P. Haynes  
Thomas Lacey  
Brian Reilly  
Councilor Janis Manwaring  
Denise Burchsted (Arrived at 4:39 PM)

**Staff Present:**

Tara Kessler, Planner

**Members Not Present:**

Sadie Butler  
George Hansel

**1. Call to order**

Chair Haynes called the meeting to order at 4:34 PM.

**2. Minutes – March 21, 2016**

Councilor Manwaring made the motion to accept the minutes of March 21, 2016. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

**3. Notifications**

**a) Eversource Energy 76W5 and L76W5 Distribution Line**

Chair Haynes noted that the NH Department of Environmental Services (DES) has approved the wetland permit for this project with conditions.

**b) National Grid Utility Maintenance Notification**

Ms. Kessler stated that this item is with respect to vegetation clearance that will occur in the northeast corner of Keene along the utility rights-of-way. Mr. Reilly asked if the Commission needs to be notified of maintenance activities each time they occur. Mr. Kessler stated that the City receives the notice from DES; however, it is not necessary to share it with the Commission. She stated that she shares all notifications with the Commission to keep them informed. She continued, stating that if new impacts to wetland areas should occur, a new wetland permit would need to be obtained.

**c) City of Keene Wetlands Utility Maintenance**

Ms. Kessler noted that this item is informational and stated that a liner for a sewer main will be replaced in the southern area of Keene.

**4. West Street Dam- VHB Report Update & Discussion**

Ms. Kessler noted that she received an updated report from VHB for the West Street Dam study. She noted that VHB has completed the suggested edits to the tables and figures; made changes to the charts/figures to make them clearer; and, included notations that clarify the design of the flashboards to break away at a certain flood stage (e.g. 100 year flow). Ms. Kessler will share the revised report with Commission members.

Ms. Kessler noted that VHB is not able to produce an inundation map that displays bank full flow conditions. They have completed their scope of work for this project and do not have remaining funds to re-run the model and map the results. She continued, stating that VHB has provided an estimated cost of \$900 to perform this task. Ms. Burchsted asked if VHB would be willing to share the model and the Commission could model the data. Ms. Kessler noted that she is not comfortable running the model but would inquire about this possibility with VHB. She noted that VHB did not think there would be a significant difference between the average annual flow conditions and bank full conditions. She suggested the Commission determine how the additional information would be used and if they feel it is necessary.

Mr. Lacey noted that having a model with bank full conditions would provide information that average flow conditions do not present. Ms. Kessler noted that VHB chose to run the model and display potential inundation using average flow conditions because they heard from individuals on the Commission that there was greater interest in the impact of the dam removal scenario on low flow conditions. Chair Haynes asked members if this is important information for the Commission to possess in order to make a recommendation on the dam. Mr. Lacey stated that if the average flow model is similar to the bank full model then the Commission may not need additional information. Mr. Lacey noted that the additional information is not likely going to change his decision on the matter.

Ms. Burchsted stated that it is important to look at the bigger picture and think about the wetlands and their role in relation to the river. She continued, noting that any change to the dam will alter the wetlands and that the Commission needs to understand what the effects will be. Ms. Burchsted stated that in order to obtain this information a detailed study must be conducted. Ms. Burchsted noted that a bypass channel is also an option for the dam. Chair Haynes noted that a large amount of money is necessary to conduct further studies in order to answer these questions. Ms. Burchsted noted that if dam removal is done incorrectly there is the potential for serious negative impacts.

Councilor Manwaring stated that she is concerned with the effects of climate change on the wetlands. She continued, stating concern with the potential impact a hydropower facility will have on surrounding wetland areas. Mr. Reilly noted that extreme weather is also a concern.

Ms. Kessler stated that on May 19, VHB will deliver an informational presentation to City Council on the West Street Dam study and report. Ms. Kessler noted that representatives from West Street Hydro will also present at this meeting and will be providing an update on West Street Hydro. She continued, stating that the presentations will be at the beginning of the meeting and will be available online as well. Ms. Kessler noted that she and Chair Haynes will attend the meeting and represent the Commission's position. She stated that all members are welcome. Ms. Kessler stated that a recommendation from the Commission is not necessary at this time. She continued, stating that this project has not been before the Council in many years.

Ms. Burchsted noted that based on her experience with other states there are regulatory processes that might require further study of wetlands impacts with respect to dam removal. She continued, stating that permits would be necessary as well as extensive feasibility studies if the dam is to be altered. Ms. Burchsted suggested that staff contact someone at the state level in order to understand the process. Mr. Lacey inquired as to why the City has not conducted this study when the dam notification was sent. Ms. Burchsted noted that to do a detailed environmental impact assessment it would cost a substantial amount of money. Mr. Lacey asked if the City is aware of the protocols necessary if the dam is removed. Ms. Kessler stated that she will inquire with the Public Works Director. Ms. Burchsted noted that further studies are necessary to understand the environmental impacts and the results from the current study only provide hydraulic water flow data. She continued, stating that it would be best to contact the state in order to understand protocols. Ms. Burchsted noted that it is important to understand the impacts of dam removal on the endangered species, specifically the dwarf wedge mussel and the quillwort. She noted that the study does not provide evidence that dropping the water level will not affect the wetlands. Councilor Manwaring questioned why the Commission had to put money into the study if it was necessary for the city to conduct a study. Mr. Reilly noted that a hydropower facility would have to install flashboards, which would affect the wetlands.

Chair Haynes noted that the next step is to understand the state regulatory process and what will be required for each possible scenario – dam removal, maintain the existing dam, or the addition of flashboards. Councilor Manwaring noted that there is a report from the state addressing necessary items for dam repair. Ms. Burchsted noted that installing flashboards is a FERC requirement and this would be a federal regulation due to the Clean Water Act. Ms. Burchsted noted that there is an issue with the streambed and bank scour as well with the 5-foot drop in water. Councilor Manwaring asked how to address the bypass channel suggestion. Ms. Burchsted stated that it is an appropriate time to address this topic. She continued, noting that a bypass channel is a worthy alternative. Mr. Lacey stated that the bank flow model may not be necessary because other studies might still necessary.

Ms. Kessler noted that at the moment the bypass channel is not one of the alternatives before the City Council and the challenge will be presenting this option given that the three options of dam removal, dam repair and hydropower conversion are on the table. Chair Haynes stated that he was surprised that the bypass channel was not an option. Councilor Manwaring stated that fish

ladders were also discussed and has concern with this option and its efficiency. Mr. Lacey noted that it is a good time to bring up the alternative of a bypass channel to the Council.

Ms. Burchsted noted that a way to present this to the Council is noting that the Commission is concerned with the lack of fish passage and fish ladders are not appropriate but the bypass channel may be a good alternative. She continued, stating that the bypass channel could be an alternative for hydropower as well as dam removal. Councilor Manwaring noted that during the public hearing on this topic many people spoke out about this option. Ms. Burchsted stated that she will send comments in reference to the three dam alternatives to Ms. Kessler who will in turn email the Commission Members.

#### **5. Conservation Master Plan Report**

Chair Haynes noted that the Greenways Working Group was focused on identifying a new definition for a greenway and to determine greenway and corridor locations. Chair Haynes shared a revised definition of greenway and noted the City's river corridors as an option for locating greenways. Potential locations include Ashuelot River, Beaver Brook, Black Brook, and White Brook. He noted that many of the river corridors coordinate well with recreation activities. Chair Haynes noted that greenways could also coincide with rail trail corridors, which are well established in the Region. Chair Haynes noted that there are ecological corridors, which may need further study to understand the wildlife diversity in these areas.

Chair Haynes stated that he looked into the Quabbin to Cardigan (Q2C) initiative, which is focused on preserving an ecological corridor between the Quabbin Reservoir in Massachusetts and Mount Cardigan in NH. He noted that the City is located within this corridor. Chair Haynes pointed out significant conservation land and secondary conservation land on the map. He noted that there is a potential to connect on a bigger scale outside of Keene with wildlife corridors.

Ms. Burchsted inquired about the Wildlife Action Plan habitat maps. Mr. Reilly handed out the maps to Commission members. Ms. Burchsted noted the connection and suggested a possible overlay on the current map. Chair Haynes noted that a large amount of the supporting habitat is located in the western part of Keene. He continued, stating that the Ashuelot River area is currently high ranking in terms of wildlife habitat. Chair Haynes discussed other areas that are supporting important wildlife habitat. Chair Haynes noted that there is potential for linking wildlife habitat and green trails.

Mr. Lacey suggested conducting citizen surveys to learn more about wildlife locations. Chair Haynes asked if there is a way for people to add information online. Mr. Lacey suggested having the Keene Sentinel involved. Chair Haynes noted that this is a part of the public education as well. Ms. Burchsted suggested using participatory GIS for data collection. Councilor Manwaring stated concern with letting people know where specific animals are located specifically due to hunting.

Mr. Reilly suggested gathering information from roadkill data from the Public Works Department and Police Department or ask where most roadkill is located. Ms. Burchsted suggested Dr. Ken Bergman as a resource, who has camera traps around Keene and specifically, around the Ashuelot River. Ms. Burchsted noted that he is a huge asset at Keene State College and his input would be very helpful. Ms. Burchsted noted that greenways could be connected to recreational activities. Councilor Manwaring stated that Pathways for Keene raises money for trails.

Ms. Burchsted gave a status update from the Surface Water Working Group. She noted that she does not have much to report on for this working group. She noted that she is interested in having her class conduct an aquatic natural resource inventory (NRI), possibly around the Ashuelot River. She continued, noting that vernal pools would not be a part of this NRI and would need to be a separate project

Councilor Manwaring gave a status from the Wildlife Working Group and stated that a more detailed report will be present next month.

Mr. Reilly and Mr. Lacey gave a status from the NRI Working Group. Mr. Reilly stated that the UNH Cooperative Extension and other towns have NRI examples. He continued, stating that two communities conducted their own NRI and another community hired consultants. Mr. Reilly noted that the common thread for all the NRI's was GIS mapping. He continued, noting that some towns separated the NRI and Conservation Plan or created specific categories. Mr. Reilly noted that the City of Keene Conservation Plan created by Keene State College (KSC) is very comprehensive and should be used as a template. Mr. Reilly stated that the Commission may be ready to include a consultant. Mr. Lacey noted that the plan from KSC needs more detail and editing but can be used as a model.

Chair Haynes agreed that it should be used as a model or outline as opposed to a reference document. Mr. Reilly inquired about a missing section of the appendix. Ms. Burchsted stated that she will ask about the missing sections. Mr. Lacey noted that the plan was never completed. Mr. Lacey suggested the Commission gather more information before hiring a consultant. He continued, stating that a consultant would be hired for specific inventories and get a boundary survey. The Commission agreed that two different consultants are necessary for conducting an inventory and putting together a final plan.

Chair Haynes suggested Committee Members review the Keene State College document. Chair Haynes noted that this document did not discuss greenways, however. Ms. Burchsted stated that both plans can merge together. Ms. Burchsted asked who would be reviewing or using the Conservation Plan.

Mr. Lacey noted that the Conservation Plan would be a recommendation plan. He continued, giving an example of the increase in mountain biking and noted that land is being used more and in different ways. Mr. Lacey stated that this plan is to help steer wise land use. He continued,

stating that Keene has a lot of land and there is little management planning. Ms. Kessler stated that it is important to discuss the purpose of the plan and having this information will help to get adequate estimates from consultants. She continued, noting that she contacted five consultants and gave a broad overview of the work. Ms. Kessler noted that most of the consultants needed more details. She continued that one consultant gave an estimate of \$15,000-20,000 to develop a plan that address land management strategies on City owned conservation land and also establishes goals for future land conservation for the City. Mr. Lacey stated that a forest inventory is necessary and that the consultants Ms. Kessler spoke with do not do these types of inventories.

Chair Haynes noted that the Commission is looking for two different consultants. Mr. Lacey noted that his group's focus was to look at specific data that needed to be gathered. Mr. Reilly agreed and stated that many NRIs did not have specific recommendations. Chair Haynes stated that each group was created in order to understand the Commission's priorities. Ms. Burchsted asked if the Commission can hire someone now to get a timber inventory. Councilor Manwaring suggested that Mr. Reilly and Mr. Lacey determine specific tasks for the Conservation Plan for the next meeting.

Ms. Burchsted suggested the Commission discuss future partners for the Conservation Plan at the next meeting. Chair Haynes noted that Mr. Hansel mentioned that it would be used by the City as a guide. Ms. Kessler noted that it is important to know the audience and remember why the Commission wanted the plan. She continued, stating that it was initially proposed in order to help guide the Commission and its actions. Councilor Manwaring stated that the plan was discussed because the Commission had more stable funding. She continued, stating that with these finances it was important for the Commission to know how to use it. Councilor Manwaring noted that it would also influence the next master plan.

#### **6. Surface Water Protection Ordinance**

Ms. Kessler distributed a document containing comments shared by City staff on the proposed amendments to the Surface Water Protection Ordinance. She continued, stating that this could be discussed at the next meeting.

#### **7. New or Other Business**

Ms. Kessler noted that there a bid package has been issued for the Woodland Cemetery and the bid solicitation date is May 17<sup>th</sup>.

#### **8. Staff Updates**

None at this time.

#### **9. Adjournment-Next meeting date-April 18, 2016**

Chair Haynes adjourned the meeting at 6:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted by:  
Lana C. Bluege, Minute-taker  
April 18, 2016

Reviewed and edited by:  
Tara Kessler, Planner  
May 6, 2016