

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, November 15, 2016

8:00 AM

Room 12 Recreation Center

Members Present:

Arthur Winsor, Chair
George Foskett
Jenna Spear-O'Mara
Judy Sadoski (Arrived at 8:08 AM)

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Director Parks, Recreation,
& Cemeteries

Members Not Present:

Chuck Redfern
Susan Thielen
Councilor Steve Hooper

1) Welcome & Call to Order

Chair Winsor called the meeting to order at 8:04 AM.

2) Approval of October 11, 2016 Minutes

Mr. Foskett made a motion to approve the minutes of October 11, 2016, which was seconded by Ms. Spear-O'Mara and carried unanimously.

3) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon stated the finance report remains unchanged. He added that Mark continues to work in the park, including leaf clean-up, and he expects to see an invoice for that soon. Chair Winsor noted the work is a significant undertaking. He questioned if there is a way to prequalify the work to seek a professional landscaper. Mr. Bohannon noted a professional would ensure a price increase. Ms. Spear-O'Mara replied it seems as though the cost is worthwhile. Mr. Bohannon noted that two years ago, two contracts were combined to address facilities, police department, and the library; he is tempted to separate those contracts again because he thinks they warrant two different services.

Mr. Foskett noted he has received more compliments on the park this year than in the past. In addition to Mark's work and the lack of rain, he noted the difference the raised cobblestones have made. He asked what happened to the man who did the brick work.

Mr. Bohannon replied that contract ended, he lost the bid by \$200. Mr. Foskett said he would like him to be considered and if the difference is only \$200 again, he would give the work to him. He thinks the park has transformed from a very sunny park to one with a great deal of shade as the trees have grown; the character of the park has changed. He thinks a professional arborist could help change the character of what is planted; for the understory trees to be more shade tolerant. Chair Winsor suggested someone from the Conway School.

Mark is contracted through winter and the bid will go out again.

4) Report from the Friends of the Arboretum at Ashuelot River Park

The Lions Club has begun work in the round area that has been rotor tilled in the rear of the arboretum. They were waiting for the tilling to be complete before purchasing items for the area. Mr. Foskett has spoken with Sue Silver about it.

Mr. Foskett noted the park looks great and the knotweed has really been trimmed down. Mr. Bohannon said they are unsure who did that work but are grateful because the work was done properly. Additional improvements have taken place to have more open visible space, to brush hog the Rachel Marshall Learning Lab, etc. The improvements are helping to keep homeless activity at bay.

5) Park Discussion

a. Park Vision

The Ashuelot River Park shall be a place of beauty, unique for its landscaped arboretum, and as a place of quiet recreation and social events for the enjoyment and education of the Community, bringing together individuals and organizations with an interest in maintaining the Park for future generations.

Mr. Bohannon stated he recently met with Ken Stewart regarding the next phase of the Ashuelot Green Spaces and needing additional language for the trust. He said he was not aware of this vision statement and thinks it highlights a lot of discussion points the Board has had. He thought it was a good time to revisit it and decide how to move forward.

Mr. Bohannon said the vision statement talks about organizations interested in helping maintain the park and noted the Friends are working on that effort. He asked how to define “a place of quiet recreation.” He thinks that implies more passive recreation while the mention of social events raised his attention. There have never been many social events in the park besides Art in the Park. He asked if there was a greater intention to have more. Chair Winsor replied yes, when the park opened there was a small travelling theater group that performed in the park for children. He said things like that used to happen infrequently and the intention was to make events like that possible. Art in the Park is the only event that has continued, yet they have stopped donating. Chair Winsor said the park is a good place for such events but the Board needs to decide what events are good to have and which are not.

Mr. Foskett said he disagreed. He said one of the reasons he hopes Mr. Stewart's group is successful is to move that kind of social activity to the green space and foster quiet recreation at the park and arboretum. Ms. Sadoski agreed that any kind of activity can inhibit passive recreation and quietness of small groups. She does not want to open the park to large events like weddings which would inhibit others use of the park.

Mr. Bohannon said he gets a lot of requests for weddings and he allows use for groups no greater than 15-25 people with the understanding that it is a public park; most are fine with that for small gatherings and he does not have a problem with that use. Once the green space is developed, it will accommodate larger events because of the pavilion, etc. He said the question now is how to promote activities in the current park which dissuade bad behavior. He does not think much will change until the situation behind Hannaford's is addressed.

Board members agreed increasing positive activity in the Rachel Marshall Learning Lab is critical. Possibilities include a pump track and dog park, among others. Mr. Bohannon believes that parking area is within the trust, but will confirm the trust owns it.

Ms. Spear-O'Mara stated she is content with the vision as written because the Board can interpret it and move forward knowing large events will not be permitted. Chair Winsor said park use is high, which is a good thing. Mr. Bohannon thinks the character of the arboretum needs to change because of its age; it would be good to bring in an arborist from Bartlett Tree. He is also willing to contact Chuck Simpson about that work. There seems to be a higher volume of park use than three years ago and Mr. Ketchum is dedicated to maintaining the trails. Chair Winsor said, like the succession of a forest, the park has changed with time; he thinks Mr. Simpson is a good person to contact. Mr. Bohannon will invite Mr. Simpson to the next meeting. He thinks a group like LINKS or the Lions Club would help make a lot of the changes. Ms. Spear-O'Mara will investigate if there are grants available because of the bee crisis.

Ms. Spear-O'Mara added that Keene High School has the Cheshire Career Center and all students have to do career hours and they may be able to have 10-15 students come help. Mr. Bohannon noted the difficulty with students is transportation; Ms. Spear-O'Mara suggested a weekend work day. Ms. Sadoski said the Rotary may be able to contribute as well; she will contact them. Mr. Foskett noted he would prefer small groups working in segments to be more productive.

The Board agreed to maintain the vision statement as written without intention of allowing large social events in the main park space and with the intention to revisit the vision statement.

b. Park Maps

Mr. Bohannon noted on the map what belongs to the trust and what does not as informational.

c. Fee Structure

Mr. Bohannon said if the Board were to initiate fees, he would base them on maintenance; there is a flat \$150 maintenance fee which is just to pay the workers hourly wages, it does not include machinery, etc. He said that is when to take a fee into consideration; the fee could be increased to include wear and tear on equipment which would increase the fee to approximately \$300. Mr. Foskett asked if artists have to pay to rent their booths at Art in the Park. Mr. Bohannon was unsure but he imagines they rent booths for \$100. Mr. Foskett said Art in the Park used to give the Friends a \$100 contribution, but they have not in three years. He will contact Sue Silver about it.

Ms. Spear-O'Mara asked if the language in the fee structure can reflect the difference when use of the park includes space in the park being rented. If they are taking money in for their organization, they should be able to contribute to the park. She said there must be a precedent set in other parks they could look at.

Ms. Sadoski noted in initiating a fee structure, it is harder to deny use of the park; a suggested donation based on event size and timeline would create less conflict. Mr. Bohannon suggested Mr. Foskett contact Brain Mattson as well because he knows the history of Art in the Park. Mr. Bohannon said once the Board knows more about the status of the green space, that will be a better time to initiate a fee structure because there will be a rentable pavilion.

The Board agreed to keep revisiting the fee structure with further information.

6) New Business

Chair Winsor asked if further discussion has taken place about the pump track. Mr. Bohannon said he has an upcoming meeting to build a trail map for the bike paths. There are interested parties and he thinks a larger conversation is coming. It is a minor financial investment and both children and adults enjoy the activity. It would be designed to mitigate minimal environmental impacts; for example, building swales to catch runoff. It is just designed to be a natural biking obstacle course. The City's liability insurance would cover the use because it is a recreation activity.

Mr. Foskett asked about Kim Bergeron. Mr. Bohannon replied he still runs Kev's Kayaks in Fitzwilliam. He is interested in using the park, but river levels were low this year. He has transported groups to and from the park before.

7) Next Meeting Date – December 13, 2016

8) Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Chair Winsor adjourned the meeting at 8:53 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,

ARPAB Meeting Minutes
November 15, 2016

Katie Kibler, Minute Taker