

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
RETREAT MINUTES

Monday, May 18, 2015

5:30 PM

2nd Floor Conference Room, City Hall

Members Present:

Chair Thomas P. Haynes
Thomas Lacey
Matthew Walton
Bill Fleeeger
Councilor Janis Manwaring
Brian Reilly
George Hansel

Staff Present:

Rhett Lamb, Planning Director

Members Not Present

Others Present:

Ann Shedd

1. Call to order

Chair Haynes called the meeting to order at 5:35 PM.

2. Keene Conservation Plan

Chair Haynes stated that the retreat is an opportunity to see how the plan will move forward. He continued, stating that Ann Shedd was asked to join the retreat because she initiated the Conservation Plan. Chair Haynes stated that Ms. Shedd provided an outline of How to prepare a Conservation Plan from the Natural Resource Council Service. He continued, stating that this was sent out some time ago along with other outlines. Chair Haynes stated that he likes both models. Chair Haynes stated that the Committee has an understanding of why a conservation plan should be created but the next steps are not as clear.

Chair Haynes stated that he hopes to determine objectives and goals and ultimately how to move the plan forward. Ms. Shedd stated that Mr. Fleeeger's students did a considerable amount of work and is a good start but the plan is not there yet.

Ms. Shedd stated that there are some items that need a little more detail. She continued, stating that The Cooperative Extension suggestions should be reviewed thoroughly. Ms. Shedd stated

that the action plan itself needs to be a little more specifics well as the Natural Resource Inventory. She continued, stating that this Conservation Plan appears to be very top down in comparison to other municipality's conservation plans. Ms. Shedd stated that other plans have

community activity in the very beginning. She continued, stating that at some point the Committee should put this out to the public for input. Ms. Shedd stated that Mindmixer would be a great tool to receive comments from the public. Mr. Lamb stated that Mindmixer is a social media platform to put ideas out into the public as well as receive comments.

Ms. Shedd stated that Parks and Recreation did a survey using Mindmixer as well. She continued, stating that the top scores from the public focused on open space protection and greenways. She continued, stating that a reasonable request would be to include a summary of existing regulatory input to conservation issues. Ms. Shedd stated that there is the Surface Water Protection Ordinance but there are also state guidelines. Ms. Shedd stated that these levels of protection would be helpful to future generations of the Conservation Commission. Ms. Shedd brought up the example of the golf course and the use of pesticides and herbicides. She continued, stating that this turned out to be the state domain. Mr. Lacey stated that laws are very specific for this topic. Ms. Shedd stated that knowing these regulations would be helpful in understanding the City's domain.

Ms. Shedd stated that in relation to the NRI, there are several maps from New Hampshire Fish and Game. She continued, stating that the students have done a great job identifying specific properties in the conservation zone but there is an opportunity to get more specific. Mr. Lacey stated he has a document with all of the revised parcels with conservation easements. He continued, stating that these would provide a revision for tables on pg. 8 and pg. 10 in the Conservation Plan. Ms. Lacey stated that the parcels are public and private land. Ms. Shedd stated that in the City database, all easements are lumped together. Ms. Shedd stated that this is the type of information that the Conservation Plan needs. Ms. Shedd stated that utility right of ways should also be included in the plan and many abut conservation land. Ms. Shedd stated that it is important to know where they are.

Ms. Shedd stated that the students did a good job to determine what land has NRI and management plans and what land does not. She continued, stating that it will be the Commission's job to prioritize these lands. Ms. Shedd stated that this information needs to be interpreted in how it all fits together in terms of wetlands, habitat and agriculture etc. Ms. Shedd stated that in terms of human needs, the Commission should determine walking corridors. Ms. Shedd stated that forests also need to be managed and protected.

Ms. Shedd stated that pollinators should also have a focus in the chapter about potential threats. She continued, stating that the Commission needs to work towards an action plan and the various forms of protection. Ms. Shedd stated that the code rewrite process should be discussed as well perhaps by Mr. Lamb. Ms. Shedd stated that there is a Forest Management Plan that goes back 20 years which may need revising. Mr. Lamb stated that it is actually a Land Management Guideline. He continued, stating that this came up because of forestry activity that caused some debate.

Ms. Shedd stated the Commission needs to decide what actions are priorities. Ms. Shedd stated that the staffing and management resources are touched upon in the plan and these resources are limited. She continued, stating that Ms. Shedd stated that other towns likely used grants to hire outside services for creating a Conservation Plan. Mr. Hansel asked if the Committee has looked

into a grant through the county. Mr. Lamb stated that there are many different priorities for the Planning Department and it is difficult to manage resources. Ms. Shedd stated that air quality and greenhouse gases are often confusing to people but important. She continued, stating that Cities for Climate Protection deals specifically with greenhouse gases. Ms. Shedd stated that this should be a topic at a county level.

Mr. Walton stated that air quality should be discussed by the Conservation Committee. Ms. Shedd stated that air quality was added to the Committee's natural resource list last year. Mr. Lamb stated that the particulate matter is the one thing that comes close to hitting our threshold. He continued, stating that there are already people working on this however.

Chair Haynes stated that creating a concrete list of goals and objectives is an important start. He continued, stating that the models provided will help the Committee determine goals. Chair Haynes stated that Keene does not have Conservation Plan and that is the main reason for creating one. Mr. Fleeger stated that it seems Ms. Shedd is proposing a professional plan by an outside consultant with a more detailed analysis. He continued, stating that a higher level plan is necessary for the City. Mr. Fleeger stated that the Committee can build off the plan in its current state or possibly hire a consultant that works with the Committee. He continued, stating that the issues identified are still relevant however.

Ms. Shedd stated that the Parks and Recreation Department have put more resources put into Wheelock Park than the current Conservation Plan for Keene. Chair Haynes stated that he sees the Conservation Plan as a mix of the Committee members doing leg work as well as an outside professional. Mr. Hansel stated that it makes sense to hire someone to drive the process and find other assets that may already exist. He continued, stating that the plan will get there faster with a professional driving it. Mr. Reilly stated that he agrees. Mr. Hansel asked if the Professional Master Plan included a consultant. Mr. Lamb stated that an outside professional started the plan and was finished internally. Ms. Shedd stated this plan did not focus on recreation and open space as originally suggested. Councilor Manwaring stated that part of this was due to funding.

Mr. Lamb stated that either way the Committee proceeds; the outline will be about the same. Mr. Lacey stated that the Committee further along with the plan that it seems. He continued, stating that the City is in very good condition with large amount of open space and wildlife. Mr. Lacey stated that the Committee needs to hire foresters and get an inventory. He continued, stating that the City used to manage the land better and if the Committee needs a consultant then so be it. Mr. Lacey stated that the results will not be much different than if a consultant worked on the plan but understands the Committee members do not have a lot of time. Mr. Lacey suggested using timber sales for funding. Mr. Hansel stated that it is important to have a professional and concise plan. He continued, stating that it needs to be usable. Mr. Lacey read aloud a description of Keene from the Master Plan. He continued, stating that this does not describe the Keene he knows and the accuracy of a consultant could be in question. Chair Haynes stated that this plan needs to be a professional plan and how this occurs is in question.

Mr. Fleeger stated that the productions of maps are important and the City may not be able to support this. Mr. Lamb stated that it is about resources and time. Mr. Fleeger stated that he would lean towards someone that has the resources and obligation to do this. Mr. Fleeger stated

that consultants are being paid to follow up with difficult questions and there is an advantage to that. Mr. Hansel asked if the Committee would be able to determine what maps are necessary. Mr. Fleeger stated that this plan will make the job of the consultant very easy. He continued, stating that it comes down to how much the Committee wants to spend. Mr. Walton stated that if specific threats are clear, then the Committee should prioritize a few and go forward with them. Mr. Walton stated that he does not want to wait a year to act on the plan.

Mr. Reilly asked how much information the Committee can obtain from other organizations. Chair Haynes stated that this comes back to the goals and objectives and then determine where to find this information. Mr. Lamb stated that it depends on how deep the Committee wants to go into an NRI. He continued, stating that many areas have an NRI. Mr. Lamb stated that an in-depth Natural Resource Inventory of the City can be a huge challenge. He continued, stating that a lot of information is available but not at an in-depth higher level. Ms. Shedd stated that many properties have a more detailed NRI because the land was considered for an easement. Mr. Lamb stated that there are limitations to using the resources available.

Mr. Hansel stated that he sees this as an actionable concise plan and detailed maps may not be necessary. Mr. Lacey stated that there is land owned by the City and by private entities. He continued, stating that it might be a priority to focus on just City land and be aware of private properties with conservation value.

Chair Haynes stated that it would be best to determine goals and the level of depth. Mr. Fleeger stated that some conservation plans are very basic and do not go into natural resource inventories at all. He continued, stating that projects which move forward must have support from outside the Committee as well.

Chair Haynes discusses each goal laid out by Ms. Shedd from a previous meeting.

- *Update and coordinate a comprehensive natural resource inventory for the City of Keene:*

Ms. Shedd stated this is important but the level of detail should be decided. Mr. Walton stated that having an inventory of everything is a waste of resources and to focus on important parcels of land. Chair Haynes stated that the Committee can encourage people to conserve their private land in addition. Ms. Shedd stated that Friends of Open Spaces have done this with social events to include the community.

Chair Haynes asked if there is agreement to focus on city land. Mr. Walton stated that if the land is ecologically important, the Committee needs to focus on it whether it is public or private. Mr. Lacey stated that legally you cannot do an inventory on private land. Mr. Lamb stated that one cannot ignore natural resources on private property. Ms. Shedd stated that the Committee can at least map or catalog what is out there as opposed to a specific inventory. Mr. Lamb stated that it goes back to the detail of the inventory.

Chair Haynes stated that the focus seems to be on city land but to acknowledge private land with conservation value as well. Mr. Lamb stated that people with private land can also freely participate. Ms. Shedd stated that the question may come up as to the city owning easement

rights or just support the properties. She continued, stating that it will probably be easier for the City to not own any more easements. Chair Haynes stated that the primary focus seems to be on City Land and the secondary would be on private land.

- *To relate priorities to long range community values identified in the 2011 Keene Comprehensive Master Plan as well as values and goals identified as the SWRPC and other regional initiatives and other long range processes:*

Mr. Walton asked what the priorities are. Mr. Lamb stated that one is keeping the natural beauty of Keene. Chair Haynes stated that although we do not have specifics, can the Committee agree that this is an important item. Mr. Fleeger stated that more clarity would be helpful here.

- *To identify current and future threats to the city's natural resources and strategies for identifying those threats:*

Mr. Lacey stated that he would like to see some opportunities as well. He continued, stating that the positive aspects are not focused on and this item should include identifying opportunities.

- *To use the conservation plan to assist the city in rewriting it's land use code:*

Mr. Hansel stated that this depends on how fast the Conservation Plan can be made. Mr. Lamb stated that the Land Use Code has been kept on hold due to the Pilot Project. He continued, stating that the term: Land Use Code refers to capturing the areas of City regulation as it refers to development. Mr. Lamb stated that one goal is to simplify the codes so it is easier to understand and allows development to occur without difficulty. He continued, stating that intent is to bring the codes up to date as well. Mr. Lamb stated that the city is not encouraging development in the right places. Mr. Hansel asked if it is possible to get the plan completed before the Land Use Code rewrite. Mr. Lamb stated that this is likely a two year process. Chair Haynes stated that some of these items may get eliminated. Ms. Shedd stated that this is a working draft and if it has to be eliminated in the future then so be it. The Committee agreed to leave the item.

- *To provide context, guidance, and reference for rotating volunteer membership of the Conservation Commission for the Commission's advisory role and for its decisions for allocations and available funds:*

Chair Haynes stated that this is an important item to keep.

- *To provide a framework for public education and advocacy regarding the YMCAs use of publicly and privately owned natural resources for the City:*

Committee members agree to keep the goal.

- *To establish expectations of periodic updates to the NRI and Commission's priorities and goals:*

Chair Haynes stated this makes sense to self-evaluate. Ms. Shedd stated that setting time frames every 5 years or so would be beneficial.

Chair Haynes stated that it would be best for Mr. Fleeger to go through the student's goals. Mr. Fleeger stated that these are key issues however some topics, like pollinators are not on the list.

- *Conserve and protect large un-fragmented land locks of lands high ecological value:*

The Committee agrees this is an important item.

- *Connectivity between southwestern and northeastern conservation lands of Keene:*

Mr. Fleeger stated that this can also be incorporated into the first item. Mr. Lamb suggested a greenway between the two. Chair Haynes stated that the word connectivity may be the key word. Mr. Fleeger suggested changing the first item to read: "Conserve and protect large un-fragmented land locks and promote conductivity with lands of high ecological value." Chair Haynes stated that this title works well. The Committee agreed.

Mr. Reilly asked if this refers to connectivity for wildlife or everyone. Mr. Fleeger stated that all organisms including humans. Mr. Walton stated that agriculture is in opposition to ecological culture. He continued, stating that a monocrop would not be ecologically conserving. Mr. Fleeger stated that if agricultural lands are used for other development then that could be worse than just agricultural. He continued, stating that maintaining agricultural lands is a key concept. Chair Haynes stated that this goes back to how much detail is needed. Mr. Fleeger stated that focusing on areas of agricultural soils and determine how they are being used if protection is needed. Ms. Shedd stated that the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan touch on this.

- *Surface and storm water management:*

Councilor Manwaring stated that this issue is very important. Mr. Fleeger stated that this is a very specific level of inventory but is important. Ms. Shedd asked if ground water should be added to this item. Ms. Shedd suggested the title reads: "Ground, surface, and storm water management." The Committee agreed.

- *Invasive species:*

The Committee agreed that this is an important issue.

- *Education and outreach:*

Mr. Lamb stated that this item seems to be more of a process or implementation process. Chair Haynes stated that this might work better as a strategy or action plan. Ms. Shedd stated that this goal may go under each item as well. Mr. Lacey stated that participation is also important. Ms. Shedd stated that the Conservation Commission has had an active role in participation.

- *Staffing and management capacity:*

Mr. Fleeger stated that this is also a strategy item but the staff does not have the resources and it is a problem. He continued, stating that he is worried about this item getting folded into other categories. Chair Haynes suggested listing the management of resources as an issue and staffing

and money go into the action plan. Mr. Fleeger suggested the goal read: proper management of resources. Chair Haynes stated that the wording can be tweaked in the future.

- *Greenhouse gas emissions:*

Ms. Shedd asked if it should read air quality and greenhouse gas emissions. Mr. Fleeger stated that this may not be an issue that the Committee wants to take on. Ms. Shedd stated that it is a key issue. Mr. Lamb asked if the document covers wildlife and habitat. Mr. Fleeger replied no. He continued, stating that this is similar to the pollinator issue as well. Mr. Fleeger stated that this may fall under the first key issue of protecting un-fragmented land. Mr. Lamb stated that the hunting community may ask you to give more detail on this issue. Chair Haynes asked if there should be a separate wildlife issue. Mr. Lamb stated it will come up with the NRI as well. Ms. Shedd stated that wildlife should be a separate key issue. Chair Haynes stated that wildlife needs to be addressed as an issue.

Mr. Fleeger stated that a pollinator item should also be added. Chair Haynes asked if the Committee would like to work on the plan with a contractor. Mr. Walton suggested working on the plan internally first and then discuss a consultant in the future. Ms. Shedd suggested someone from Monadnock Conservancy talk to the Committee. Mr. Lamb stated that they do not have the appropriate support anymore. Mr. Hansel stated that he would research County grant resources. Councilor Manwaring stated that it would be beneficial for smaller sub-committees to focus on each item. Chair Haynes stated that he hopes this will occur down the road.

Mr. Walton stated that the Conservation Plan should be on the agenda. Mr. Lamb suggested putting this item at the beginning of the agenda. Chair Haynes stated that the Committee needs time to think about how to proceed with this plan. Mr. Lacey asked where the document will be used and its location. Mr. Fleeger stated that it should reside with all of the Committee members and he will send it over to Mr. Lamb again.

3. Adjournment

Chair Haynes adjourned the meeting at 7:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted by:
Lana Bluege, Minute-taker
June 15, 2015