

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, September 12, 2017

8:00 AM

Recreation Center, Room 12

Members Present:

George Foskett
Chuck Redfern
Judy Sadoski
Councilor Steve Hooper

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation & Facilities
Director

Members Not Present:

Arthur Winsor, Chair
Jenna Spear-O'Mara, Vice Chair
Susy Thielen

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Mr. Bohannon called the meeting to order at 8:14 AM.

2) Approval of Minutes – August 8, 2017

Mr. Foskett made a motion to approve the minutes of August 8, 2017, which was seconded by Ms. Sadoski and carried unanimously.

3) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon reported no changes to the budget. The next anticipated invoice will be for Chuck Simpson's replacement planting.

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

Last month the Friends discussed Mr. Simpson's contract and work commencing. He noted Chair Winsor was going to look into Tower Hill Park; Mr. Bohannon believes he has. He asked Mr. Bohannon if he applied for the Land, Water, and Conservation Fund grant; Mr. Bohannon replied no, he sent a letter of intent to the state to fund the Ashuelot Green Space. He met with people who oversee the project a few weeks ago and funding may not be possible because the land is privately owned and to be awarded the project it must be owned by the City. This is still possible but he does not foresee it politically before December; it may not go through this grant round. Mr. Bohannon will try to find

out the status but the project would have to be shovel-ready by August 2018 and he does not think it is fiscally or politically ready.

Mr. Foskett asked if Mr. Bohannon had spoken with the Keene High School Principal about the agriculture/horticulture club. Mr. Bohannon replied he hopes to have an opportunity to follow-up in the next few weeks.

Mr. Foskett reported he was unable to attend the Links program. Councilor Hooper said he was there, it was amazing, and he saw a wonderful effort for major cleanup; he can see the river so much better and is enthusiastic. He was there to finish his island area with the dedication stones. Mr. Bohannon said it was a good day with nine female, hardworking volunteers, who did a fantastic job. They also had two staff supervisors. Members of the Friends were there as well and a member of the Old Homestead Garden Club. Between everyone there, an entire area was redone; a lot was accomplished in a few hours. He said they are great people and he thanked them.

Mr. Foskett noted the cobbles in front of the gazebo have not been placed yet; Mr. Bohannon replied no, but he intends to before the end of the year.

5) West Street Hydro Report/Discussion

Mr. Foskett reported from the Friends that there has been discussion for many years about the West Street Hydro project and the biggest concern is that the pool behind the dam be maintained. There was discussion at one point that for hydro to work they would need to install boards on the dam and water would be channeled into the hydro facility. He said if that happens, it is the Friends understanding that the water going over the dam currently no longer will; this will eliminate the sound of the waterfall and may increase the noise of traffic in the park. The Friends also do not think it will look good without the pond behind the dam. He said while the educational values and generating electricity are great, the friends have these concerns; they are not opposing it but have questions.

Councilor Hooper asked if the water level behind the dam will decrease. Mr. Foskett says he hopes to make sure it will not. Ms. Sadoski noted the report from West Street Hydro said they would install boards to raise the water level, but if they are taking water off we will likely see the boards and not the waterfall. Mr. Bohannon agreed, with boards water will be funneled toward the hydro plant and water will come through there as opposed to over the dam. They have said the plant will not operate in low flow conditions. He anticipates with this structure the dam will remain in place, the hydro plant will be built, and water will go through the plant on the left/south side of the dam but all the infrastructure will remain.

Ms. Sadoski said if no water is going over that dam it becomes an intriguing place for people to play, which is dangerous. Mr. Foskett agreed that the boards would be dangerous as well; Mr. Bohannon agreed and they would be permanent. Ms. Sadoski said they mention small turbines in the report but it does not seem they will generate that much electricity. She thinks a demonstration project is great but does not believe it is

worth the expense or what it will do to the park. She noted there was also mention of an eel ladder and she is unsure how that will impinge on the dam or surrounding area.

Mr. Bohannon said it is interesting because the City could go one of two ways: 1) remove the dam and the whole chemistry of the park is gone (there is funding to do so), or 2) it could go well as it has in other cities like Dover and Exeter where signature dams have been removed. He said he hates to say it as a native of Keene but at the same time, what will the state do to a City for an unfunded mandate to say it has to be removed; the state will help remove it but not maintain it. He said it will be a difficult decision.

Mr. Foskett said the dam poses no threat if it breaches; Mr. Bohannon agreed it is a low hazard dam. The state has given more time on this matter because of the process that has been in place; there has been no letter of deficiency for some time. Ms. Sadoski said this push is from the state but they are not initiating this; Mr. Bohannon said he was unsure about that and a lot of groups are for this project. Ms. Sadoski said there are so many major project dams and this seems insignificant. Mr. Bohannon said he will take comments and concerns from this meeting to share with Ken Stewart who has asked for something stating the representatives of the park discussed this.

Councilor Hooper said his concern is that if the West Street Hydro project is something that may prevent further damage through tearing it down then he would support a compromise that is still aesthetically pleasing to the public and to the park; he would compromise to get hydro in there to avoid total destruction of the dam.

Ms. Sadoski said if the dam is taken out some places could look more like rapids after, though the area does not have much water moving most of the time. Mr. Foskett noted at the Homestead Woolen Mill in Swanzey a dam was removed and the vegetation came back and now it is a meadow. Ms. Sadoski agreed they would likely not be left with a nice area of moving water if the dam was removed. Mr. Bohannon added the West Street dam is 16 feet, which is significant compared to Swanzey (2-3 feet). Councilor Hooper agreed that is a substantial change and he is concerned about the change in aesthetics.

Mr. Redfern said he is in favor of the dam staying but would also like to see the Friend's concerns addressed. He is a big fan of hydroelectric power. He is not against the project but wants to learn more about what is being done and return on investment. Mr. Bohannon noted it is not a City expense and there is no cost sharing; it is non-profit, not citizen funded, and he will make sure that is clear. Mr. Redfern said they also indicated that if this project goes forward they would do a greenspace to enhance the park. Mr. Bohannon said that is a good question and thinks they go hand in hand.

6) Park Discussion
a. **Chuck Simpson Update**

Mr. Bohannon said Mr. Simpson is in the middle of the project and should be coming to an end soon. Mr. Simpson was invited to these meetings to give a report on his actual process when he is able to attend.

b. **Bartlett Tree**

At the next meeting, Mr. Bohannon will have a projector in the meeting room to see the trees projected alongside the report that Bartlett shared. He will get a copy to Mr. Foskett to share with the friends. During the next meeting Mr. Bohannon will also show the work done with Cartograph for benches and trees.

c. **Past Events**

i. **KSC Links**

Discussed above.

ii. **Art in the Park**

Mr. Bohannon reported it was a rainy but successful event with no negative feedback.

7) **New Business**

Mr. Redfern noted there is citizen concern about a trail at the park that is degrading, with tree roots and puddles everywhere. He said if there is no objection from this Board, he suggests that Mr. Bohannon approach Pathways for Keene to see if they will pay for some or all of the stone dust to smooth out the trails. Mr. Bohannon said he will work with staff to do some of the work; it is a matter of getting vehicles to the remote location but thinks Public Works equipment can be used. He is not sure when it will be done but will report back with a plan next month. Mr. Redfern said Pathways mostly focuses on rail trails but they do a lot of work on other trails as well. Mr. Bohannon said he has a lot of things outlined to show what needs to be done at the park toward the Capital Improvement Plan to show the City expense of keeping what is built.

8) **Next Meeting Date – October 10, 2017**

9) **Adjournment**

Hearing no further business, Mr. Bohannon adjourned the meeting at 8:53 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker

Edits Andy Bohannon