

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, November 14, 2017

8:00 AM

Recreation Center, Room 12

Members Present:

Arthur Winsor, Chair
Jenna Spear-O'Mara
Councilor Steve Hooper
George Foskett
Judy Sadoski (Arrived Late)
Chuck Redfern (Arrived Late)

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Director of Parks, Recreation
& Facilities

Members Not Present:

Susan Thielen

1) Welcome & Call to Order

Chair Winsor called the meeting to order at 8:03 AM.

2) Approval of September 12, 2017 Minutes

Mr. Foskett made a motion to approve the September 12, 2017 minutes, which was seconded by Councilor Hooper and carried unanimously.

3) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon reported he received the invoice from Chuck Simpson for \$5,000 – the amount approved by the trustees for the landscape contract. Mr. Simpson has been paid and Mr. Bohannon is waiting for a final invoice from Mr. Johnson. Mr. Bohannon will follow-up with Mr. Simpson to find out his timeline for fall clean-up.

Mr. Foskett noted the \$500 budgeted for a miscellaneous need (commonly used at Agway) has not been used yet this year. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, those funds are still available.

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

Mr. Foskett reported that the Friends met in October and discussed how great the park looks with Mr. Simpson's work. Mr. Foskett noted there is a new volunteer, Laurie Tyler,

but he does not have her contact information; Mr. Bohannon will look into it, though he gets many phone calls about community service and many people who call do not follow through.

Mr. Foskett reported the Friends have agreed to increase the price of cobbles from \$50 to \$75; they are preparing a new application for the cobblestones but they need to reapply for 501C3 (non-profit) status, which is in progress. The Friends also decided to update the Arboretum logo; now it will only feature a tree and not people in turn of the century clothes.

Mr. Foskett recalled that a survey was conducted to determine the property line between the park and Mascoma Bank. The Friends have the resulting map, but the boundaries were never set and it will cost more to do so. Mr. Foskett approached Mascoma Bank to see if they would pay for boundary marking; the Bank expressed no interest in boundaries so Board funds may be required to do so.

Mr. Foskett reported on the five women who volunteered at the Arboretum from Clark Mortensen Insurance for the Monadnock United Way Day of Caring. He said there have been great volunteers over the years but these women were superior and accomplished so much digging up cobbles all the way from Starbuck's to the park entrance; they were very efficient. Councilor Hooper asked if follow-up thank you notes are sent to volunteers; Mr. Foskett replied yes and he hopes the Monadnock United Way will send the same group of volunteers next year.

5) Park Discussion

a. Safety

Mr. Bohannon noted he has received some emails recently about park safety concerns. Since the September meeting, there was a death in the park (on the Rachel Marshall side) as well as another overdose; there is obviously some negative behavior occurring in the park that will attract headlines. He suggested the Board discuss this matter, but first he shared his thoughts:

1. The Board has always discouraged negative activity in the park; however, this is a problem with people accessing the park from adjacent private property, whose owners do not care about these behaviors. Last year a KSC student conducted an impact mapping survey in the park (via social media) that identified hotspots for negative behavior in the park. He would like to see those survey results and share them with the Board.
2. The \$500 in the budget for miscellaneous needs could be used to address this problem. He plans to contact Hamblet Electric to inquire about replacing the old, dimmer light bulbs in the park with brighter and more efficient LEDs. His only concern is that there are only lights near the front entrance of the park (there is no lighting in the gazebo). There are a few lights in the back near the composting toilet for safety as well as one near the Jonathan Daniels trail that is not working. There is also the possibility of getting some solar powered lights in the park;

Pathways of Keene is working on adding these solar fixtures to the trails in town and Mr. Bohannon could likely get the same reasonable price that Pathways did.

Ms. Spear-O'Mara noted changing the lights at the front of the park to LEDs could help to illuminate the gazebo; she expressed concern about the ability to vandalize the solar lights. Mr. Bohannon replied the solar lights are tall like street lights, though the poles are fiberglass and damageable as opposed to steel. Chair Winsor asked if there are any lights at/on the bridge. Mr. Bohannon replied no, but solar lights could be possible there. The park lights are currently on from 4:30 PM to 9:30 PM; he suggested perhaps they should be left on later. Board members agreed that LEDs could be left on all night, though Mr. Foskett questioned if having lights on all night will encourage more activity. Mr. Bohannon replied that it may. Ms. Spear-O'Mara suggested consulting with the Police Department (PD). Mr. Foskett also questioned if the park would be better off without the gazebo; he said sometimes people use it for good reasons but it generally attracts groups. Mr. Bohannon noted there has only been minor vandalism to the gazebo (carvings, etc.)

Mr. Redfern asked if it is possible to place a fence between the park and the private property (The Melanson Company). Mr. Bohannon replied no, although Melanson's has asked for a sign to alert people that they are entering private property; but the City has not had a sign-maker recently to do so. He added that for the last two years, Peter Ketchum has done a lot of clearing in the park (Parks and Recreation assisted this fall), which has significantly reduced loitering and camping. Mr. Bohannon is working with a group to consider building a pump track (for mountain biking and BMX practice) on the Rachel Marshall side, where most of the problems are; the only hurdle is that area is in the flood plain so only a limited amount of fill can be added. Still, the location has enough space for the track, is wooded, is near the trail, is not in the arboretum, and has nearby benches where parents can watch. He is working with a few groups to begin coordinating this and thinks it could alleviate many problems in the park by eliminating that camping space. Mr. Foskett suggested Melanson's may not like the pump track because it will encourage more people in the park. Mr. Bohannon replied their concern is not individuals from the park, but people crossing through their parking lot (from the Hannaford property) to the park; many of their employee's vehicles have been broken into.

Councilor Hooper said he likes the lighting idea, both solar and LED, and thinks it will deter suspicious activity. Ms. Spear-O'Mara noted discussion has come up before about the importance of sight lines into the park; for the police to be able to see a reasonable distance into the park from the street. Mr. Bohannon agreed to review all of these ideas with the PD; similar lighting and brush clearing happens at Carpenter Field to increase sight lines.

Chair Winsor said he thinks changes to promote positive activities on the Rachel Marshall side are a great idea that should be actively pursued; Ms. Spear-O'Mara agreed it is a fun use of the space. Mr. Bohannon agreed he hopes he can make it work; he has consulted with the KSC Architecture Club about the design and the Keene/Brattleboro chapters of the NE Mountain Bike Association are thrilled about the possibility.

Additionally, both clubs can financially contribute to this already low-cost project. There is a lot of potential.

Councilor Hooper noted the composting toilet has been closed and he asked if the Board has ever considered Porta-Potties. Mr. Bohannon replied he thinks there would still be the same negative activities – drug use, alcohol use, sex, etc. – if the structure is not highly visible and active. There was discussion of cameras on the outside of the bathrooms, but he is not in favor of that idea. Ms. Spear-O’Mara added that with the increase in opioid use, workers emptying Porta-Potties often encounter needles; Mr. Redfern added they can also be easily tipped over. Councilor Hooper noted nothing behind closed doors is practical. Councilor Hooper suggested that Mr. Ketchum may be a good resource for surveillance, though he is a private citizen. Mr. Bohannon agreed he is a good resource and could also be a financial contributor. Mr. Bohannon will discuss this with the PD before the December meeting.

b. Cartegraph

Mr. Bohannon used a projector to display the Cartegraph system – asset management software the City (all departments) began using in the last year. He demonstrated how the software works and showed the details it stores about benches in the park, for example; each bench is numbered and shows location as well as a description of the dedication. This way, if a plaque is stolen, staff can track it to know where to replace it. Even if a bench does not have a plaque, the granite stone dedications next to them are recorded as well. Chair Winsor asked if there are still benches available for dedication. Mr. Bohannon replied perhaps two benches are available. Chair Winsor asked the price structure for dedicating a bench. Mr. Bohannon replied \$1,200 for a vandal-proof bench including plaque installation. He is hesitant to replace any benches, but there could be a \$150 charge for plaque dedication. Mr. Foskett asked about the benches approaching Castle Street. Mr. Bohannon replied those benches are not dedicated.

Mr. Bohannon said the next step is incorporating the tree census from Bartlett Tree. If they send the GIS layer it can be loaded into Cartegraph for tree asset management. Mr. Foskett asked if the cobbles can be incorporated into Cartegraph. Mr. Bohannon replied that is a big task and is a matter of staff time to digitize that information; he hopes to get there at some point.

c. CIP – Irrigation System

Mr. Bohannon reported that he did something new this year, pending Council and public approval. The irrigation system is in the budget for FY19; because this Board does not have operating funds, the Trustees could provide the money to move this project forward sooner. However, Mr. Bohannon created a park maintenance program with allotted money each year to ensure routine maintenance needs are met. He has put this in the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and plans to place \$50,000 into that fund each year for 8-10 years; this will create long-term solutions for various projects. This is a start toward getting the irrigation system in the park.

Mr. Foskett asked if the park will have to pay for City water for irrigation if the dam is removed. Mr. Bohannon replied if there is no dam the irrigation system would have to use City water and that would be an annual expense from the operating budget, not from the trust.

6) New Business
a. **Meeting Schedules**

Mr. Bohannon said this item was agendized because he does not think this Board needs to meet monthly, especially during the winter months. At the next meeting the Board will review a schedule of meetings for 2018 and decide which months should be cancelled. Mr. Foskett noted this is on the agenda for the Friends as well.

Chair Winsor recognized Charles Daloz from the Agricultural Commission. He asked if cub/boy scouts could work on clearing up old campsites on the west side of the park. Mr. Bohannon replied those camp sites are not on City land and after past experiences with needles, glass, altercations, etc. he will never bring members of the public, especially children, to those areas again. He said he is sure the campers are good people but many have mental health issues and he hopes there will be good help for them someday. Councilor Hooper said he will speak with Police Chief Russo about more foot patrols in the park as they are being increased Downtown. He does not think there are enough foot patrols; Ms. Spear-O'Mara agreed. Councilor Hooper recalled a friend robbed of her camera bag in the park during the day a few weeks ago. The more police presence there is, the less likely these behaviors will be. Councilor Hooper will provide an update from Chief Russo at the December meeting.

Chair Winsor recognized David Suther of Keene who asked the rules for camping in the park and if campers can be kicked out. Mr. Bohannon replied the camps are on private property and visited by Code Enforcement, the PD, and Fire Department each year to make sure no structures have been created; there was a fire death a few years ago in a structure. Because the property owners allow it, the City has little jurisdiction. There is also private property on the other side of the pedestrian bridge with five big camps. Mr. Suther suggested installing a fence there to keep people from entering these camps from the park; Mr. Bohannon will discuss that idea with the PD.

7) Next Meeting Date – December 12, 2017
8) Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Chair Winsor adjourned the meeting at 9:07 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker