

City of Keene
New Hampshire

Ahsuelot River Park Advisory Board
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, December 12, 2017

8:00 AM

Recreation Center, Room 12

Members Present:

Arthur Winsor, Chair
Councilor Steve Hooper (Arrived Late)
Chuck Redfern
George Foskett
Judy Sadoski (By Phone)

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Director of Parks, Recreation
& Facilities
Chuck Sweeney, Parks and Recreation

Members Not Present:

Jenna Spear-O'Mara, Vice Chair
Susy Thielen

1) Call to Order

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

2) Approval of Minutes – November 14, 2017

Mr. Foskett noted a correction to the minutes of November 14, 2017. On page two, in the second paragraph, the application referred to is for cobblestones, not bricks. Additionally he clarified in the finance report that Mr. Bohannon was waiting for the final invoice from Mr. Johnson not Mr. Simpson.

Mr. Foskett made a motion to approve the minutes of November 14, 2017 as amended, which was seconded by Mr. Redfern and carried unanimously.

3) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon reported that Mr. Johnson has completed landscaping and fall clean-up in the park. The 2017 budget has a remaining \$890. He tried to spend those remaining funds with Hamblet Electric but was unable to; that \$890 should be able to carry over to spring for that work on solar lighting and will be included in the 2018 budget. The Board spent a total of \$12,285 in 2017. Mr. Bohannon recalled that money is not part of the parks operating budget but from the Trust; any money spent outside normal operations comes from the Trust. Mr. Redfern noted \$3,500 was proposed for the replacement planting program, but \$5,000 was spent. Mr. Bohannon replied that is because if Mr. Simpson had

been contracted for more than \$5,000 then three quotes would have been required. Mr. Simpson was able to not exceed that \$5,000; because of his history with the park, the Board wanted to ensure he got that contract.

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

Mr. Foskett reported that the Friend met in November. It is taking a long time to complete the 501c3 process and as a result, the new brochure for the cobblestones cannot be completed. The application process for non-profit status is nearly complete. People can still purchase cobblestones during this time but at the old price of \$50 and those purchases are not tax deductible until non-profit status is achieved. The Friends will continue discussing the rules that govern cobblestones; someone wanted to write “in memory of” on a cobble but that is not allowed; dates of life are not allowed either. Mr. Bohannon said the regulations are that the cobbles can only display names and no dates of birth and death. Mr. Foskett said he understands people wanting to dedicate cobbles in memory of an individual, but this is a park and not a cemetery.

5) Park Discussion

a. Safety, continued.

Mr. Bohannon said he wanted to continue this discussion about park safety because he thinks it is part of a wider City concern. He asked the Board to participate in a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis of the park. He encouraged Board members to be honest and open about any of their concerns; he noted Chuck Sweeney of Parks and Recreation was at the meeting to better understand Board concerns. The Board identified the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the park:

- Strengths
 - Beauty and signature nature in the City
 - The dam/waterfall
 - Planning for the pump track
 - No bathroom facility – prevents bad behaviors
 - Friends of the Arboretum at Ashuelot River Park
 - Benches
 - Bartlett Tree identification
 - Chuck Simpson’s landscaping
- Weaknesses
 - Trail surface
 - No bathroom facility – for those who actually need it
 - Lighting
 - Lack of volunteerism
 - Parking with increased use – parking often spills over into Starbucks and the Mascoma Bank parking lots, which could become a problem with increased use of the park
 - Irrigation
 - Gazebo – can be a gathering space

- Lack of signage
- Dog waste bags
- Opportunities
 - More programming in the park – active programming like the photography program
 - Maintaining and improving river access for canoes and kayaks
 - Volunteer management
 - Developing the Ashuelot Green Space – more opportunities for family activities, even if the Green Space does not work out
 - Education and marketing plans, including signage
 - Increased police patrols
 - Improved trail access
 - A dog park – possible on the Rachel Marshall side; seems to be a need in the City if people clean-up after dogs and use it appropriately
 - Rachel Marshall Learning Lab – cleaning it up, clearing ground brush, and keeping select trees so that space is as open and visible as possible
 - Reporting issues, threats, and concerns to Mr. Bohannon or YourGov
- Threats
 - Perceptions of safety in the park
 - Safety concerns about bathrooms
 - The gazebo
 - Irrigation
 - Invasive species
 - Removing the dam

Mr. Bohannon said this was a good exercise to have all concerns recognized by the City so we can work on improvements and maintaining the strengths of the park. He hopes if at any time there are other ideas for this list that Board members will share them with him; he never takes these concerns as complaints but as opportunities to explore how we can make the park better.

Councilor Hooper said he has been reconsidering keeping the bathroom. He thinks it is a good idea to keep it and work on strategies to make it effective and safe and he wants the discussion to continue. Ms. Sadoski said the perception of safety in the park, particularly for women, is a major concern moving forward; if that perception gets worse it will have a significant impact on the park. Mr. Bohannon agreed and said that was why he invited Mr. Sweeney to this meeting and he will have a conversation with Ken Stewart about clearing out brush and undergrowth for greater sight lines into the park. Some great work has been done in the last few years to clear some of this in the park and Peter Ketchum, a volunteer, is willing to do more clearing work. Mr. Bohannon said as the Director of Parks and Recreation, he has a serious concern if people do not feel safe in the park; the current living conditions across the river have elevated this concern for him. Ms. Sadoski added that things are happening in the park that is not reported, but women are talking to other women in the City about this safety perception. Mr. Bohannon said he understands that some may not feel comfortable reporting these issues but he works to foster confidentiality and welcomes any calls to report problems; people can also report

problems anonymously via YourGov. He wants the public to know they have a voice to report something.

Mr. Foskett said the City tried to have a bathroom Downtown for many years and it did not work; he does not think a bathroom will ever work in the park either. Mr. Bohannon said he understands both perspectives on bathrooms and he hopes to test opening the bathroom in the spring; opening it for a few days and recording daily activity to see the potential for opening it more permanently. Councilor Hooper said better sight lines in the park as well as enhanced lighting could discourage negative activity in the bathroom. He said even if there is bad activity and the start of opening the bathroom, it can help the Board and City to explore additional safety measures. Ms. Sadoski asked if there is potential to move the bathroom to a more visible location. Mr. Bohannon replied that was part of the plan with the Ashuelot Green Space; if that project continues the bathroom would be relocated there. Chair Winsor recognized David Suther of Keene, who said the current bathroom is large and there is standing room for several people; perhaps if it were smaller it would be less poorly utilized.

6) Meeting Schedule

The Board reviewed the proposed meeting schedule for 2018. The Board agreed to cancel the January and July meetings; other meetings can be cancelled as necessary at a later date.

Mr. Foskett made a motion to accept the 2018 meeting calendar amended to eliminate the January and July meetings, which was seconded by Mr. Redfern and carried unanimously.

7) New Business

a. Budget 2018

Mr. Bohannon said the landscape contract is up for renewal – there have been changes in the Facilities Department budget and winter clean-up is no longer needed. He would like to keep the replacement planting program and adjust that budgeted amount to \$5,000; Simpson Landscaping is in phase one of this three phase project. Mr. Bohannon will get a quote for completing the Bartlett Tree project by the February meeting; the budget does not have to be finalized until April so there is plenty of time.

b. Board Membership

Mr. Bohannon said he is working with the Mayor to have Ms. Thielen removed from the list of Board members. If anyone has recommendations to take Ms. Thielen's place they should let Mr. Bohannon know. Mr. Suther said he is interested in joining but is also going to be starting on the Bicycle/Pedestrian Path Advisory Committee and does not know if that would be a conflict. Mr. Redfern said he is on both Committee's and does not think it would be a conflict or too much work. Mr. Suther will submit a letter of interest to the Mayor.

8) Next Meeting Date – February 13, 2018

Mr. Bohannon provided an update about the Ashuelot Green Space; he will be meeting with stakeholders again to get an update on the status of this project. He had planned to apply for a grant for that project but there were some hurdles that prevented application. He will provide an update at the February meeting.

Mr. Bohannon added that West Street Hydro made a presentation to Council and will be reporting back to full Council in the late spring with their findings.

9) Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Chair Winsor adjourned the meeting at 9:00 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker