

ADOPTED

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, June 18, 2018

4:30 PM

**2nd Floor Conference Room,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Thomas P. Haynes, Chair
Andrew Madison, Vice Chair (Arrived
Late)
Councilor George Hansel
Brian Reilly
Alexander Von Plinsky IV
Eloise Clark
Art Walker, Alternate
Kenneth Bergman, Alternate

Staff Present:

Michele Chalice, Planner

Members Not Present:

Denise Burchsted

1) Call to Order

Chair Haynes called the meeting to order at 4:31 PM.

2) Minutes – April 16, 2018 & May 21, 2018

Councilor Hansel made a motion to accept the minutes of April 16, 2018, which was seconded by Mr. Walker. Mr. Reilly noted Chair Haynes' name was misspelled throughout the minutes and should be corrected. The motion to accept the minutes of April 16, 2018 as amended carried unanimously.

Councilor Hansel made a motion to accept the minutes of May 21, 2018, which was seconded by Mr. Reilly and carried unanimously.

3) Communication & Notifications – None at this meeting

4) Updates

- a. **Request for City's Top 10 ARM Priority Projects RE. Signal Mast Arm Sign Structures Project on NH Rt. 101/12/9 – NHDOT**

Chair Haynes noted he, Ms. Burchsted, and Mr. Von Plinsky met a few times; he invited Mr. Von Plinsky to speak about their conclusions regarding the top 10 list.

Mr. Von Plinsky noted he also met with Ms. Chalice and the City Engineer. Through these meetings, the sub-committee came to the conclusion that they do not have enough expertise to create a short-term top 10 list. The City Engineer is looking for project details on specific culverts and streets that the Commission cannot specify. Still, he said this is an opportunity for the Commission to act in an advisory role for medium to long-term projects in the CIP. The ARM subcommittee could be repurposed as an ecological services subcommittee to act as an “intern” to the City. The subcommittee could investigate ARM funding opportunities for projects already in the CIP, like the Victoria Street project. The subcommittee could also investigate how other cities have done similar projects in more eco-conscious ways. The City Engineer is interested in a sub-committee effort like this because he and his staff do not have time for such research. Chair Haynes agreed this is a great advisory role the Commission can be for the City.

Councilor Hansel asked if the City will submit what the Public Works Department believes are the top 10 projects to the ARM fund. Ms. Chalice replied no, but the City Engineer is willing to work with the Commission in advance to coordinate the ARM fund with CIP projects so more eco-conscious options are evaluated; she felt encouraged by his willingness. She said the Commission will need to work to understand how a project can be envisioned ahead of time to come up with a list for future CIP projects and develop financial estimates for an ARM fund application.

Ms. Clark noted the Cheshire County Conservation District funded the installation of rain gardens on a part of Court Street. She suggested rain gardens at the area in question on Winchester Street so there is some filtration through plant roots; she does not know how much funding that would require. The Ashuelot River Park Local Advisory Committee (ARLAC) sent a letter suggesting rain gardens for this project; she suggested the Commission could do the same.

Councilor Hansel said he foresees challenges doing this on a project-by-project basis. He asked if the Commission can develop higher-level concepts and fund studying them to develop best practices to be adopted by the Engineering Department. He is concerned because the City contracts out for some projects and he is unsure when there would be the time or authority to talk to a contractor regarding these concepts; Ms. Chalice agreed. Ms. Clark noted there are already best practices for hillsides and wetlands. Councilor Hansel said he was thinking more of an innovative water capture/filtration system; Ms. Clark replied that is what a rain garden is.

Chair Haynes said if the majority of members agree, they can express further interest to the City Engineer and find a way to work with him. He hopes the City Engineer can help identify possible complications and timing. Ms. Chalice will schedule another meeting with the City Engineer and subcommittee to address these issues.

Mr. Reilly said he likes Councilor Hansel's idea because replacing these conduits with larger ones will solve the problem in the short-term, but history might repeat itself in other parts of town over the next 20-30 years. He said a list of best practices that the City Engineer and staff can refer to in a situation like this is better than trying to anticipate every project that might arise in the future.

Mr. Bergman asked if a project would have to be on the CIP cycle to be considered. Councilor Hansel said the CIP is a six-year plan and projects are there during that time for financing. However, the CIP is updated annually and sometimes a project is only added one to two years in advance. Mr. Von Plinsky agreed because it is a six-year plan the Commission can have a voice on a project farther in advance, to speak with staff, and to share conservation ideas for the project (like Victoria Street, which will impact wetlands and trails and is still four years out).

Councilor Hansel said the CIP is a financial planning tool, it does not mean the design of that project is occurring that entire time; it is how the City decides to spend money from the capital budget for those six years. The execution of the engineering will come the year the project is being designed and the Commission has to find the perfect time to share their input. If there were already guidelines for a project of that type it would already be on file when staff need it. Ms. Chalice said she thought the finances in the CIP were specific and often cannot include things like rain gardens (enhanced low impact design aspects). She is unsure if the City Engineer can apply for ARM funds arguing the merit of rain gardens, receive those funds, and add those funds to the CIP. She said that was her original impression from the City Engineer. Mr. Von Plinsky noted that ecological sensitive design is not always more expensive; it may cost more up front but usually saves money long-term.

Next Steps:

- Ms. Chalice will contact the ARM fund to get more information
- The Commission will review the CIP in July
- Mr. Von Plinsky will ask the City Engineer if there are other ways the Commission can help the City
- The subcommittee will meet with the City Engineer again

b. Aquatic Resource Mitigation Fund Pre-Proposal

Mr. Von Plinsky said he met with staff from the Monadnock Conservancy about Tenant Swamp. They agreed it is a project worth pursuing, but there are too many obstacles to develop a full proposal by August 31. They recommended keeping the idea in mind but not submitting the ARM proposal this summer for the Tenant Swamp easement. Ms. Chalice said that this idea would have to go through City Council, who is not familiar with this Tenant Swamp project. The most recent City ARM projects have been on the CIP so the Council had greater previous awareness about those projects and were more comfortable with them. Staff felt this project would be hard for Council to approve because they were not yet aware of it and because it is already conservation property. Now, there is time to build Council education about this project into the future proposal.

Mr. Von Plinsky asked if the City would have to approve the idea of donating an easement before the Conservancy agrees to take an easement. Councilor Hansel replied that Council will not approve anything without a plan in place; Council could approve the donation conditionally if the Conservancy says they will take it provided the City Manager develops a memorandum of understanding with the Conservancy. Ms. Clark noted that happened for Greater Goose Pond Forest and Sterns Hill. Mr. Bergman asked if the Conservancy expressed any concerns about resources or expertise for this project. Mr. Von Plinsky replied it is a matter of priorities because they are applying for ARM funds as well and this project arose at the last minute. They are interested in the idea but it is bad timing and they might sign off in the future. Mr. Von Plinsky will stay in contact with them to try and work with them on the project at a later date.

Mr. Bergman asked how to update Council about Tenant Swamp since this is not on the CIP. Councilor Hansel suggested waiting until there is a substantive proposal to present to them or when Chair Haynes gives his presentation to Council on what the Commission is working on.

c. Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Plan

Mr. Reilly attended a walk in the forest with Jeff Littleton on May 26. Mr. Littleton used the *Reading the Forested Landscape* text to educate participants on the age of various parts of the forest. He said it was a fascinating walk that 15-20 people attended. Participants were engaged; they were mostly over 50 years old. Some participants expressed gratitude to the Commission for providing this opportunity to the community.

Chair Haynes also attended a walk in the forest (also with a predominantly older group of 10-12 participants) to a set of ledges off trail. Participants were engaged and expressed a desire for more of these walks; this is good feedback for the Commission.

Chair Haynes also met with the trails consultant, who has a lengthy (more than 150 pages) document, mostly photos, assessing the trails in the forest. The consultant has walked and assessed more miles of trails than he was contracted to do. He has provided detailed descriptions of the trail conditions and recommendations for how he sees the trails incorporating many uses. He separated the forest into Goose Pond, Drummer Hill, and the northern area because the three areas are all used differently. Chair Haynes is unsure when the next subcommittee meeting is to discuss priorities in conjunction with the recommendations. A working draft of the Stewardship Plan should be available in July, there will be another public meeting in August, and the document could be complete in September.

Mr. Reilly asked if the consultant met with the mountain bike group; they expressed interest. Chair Haynes did not know, but they have been at other meetings and there are recommendations to improve some trails for mountain biking.

Ms. Chalice noted that soon the Commission may be able to share a Google Drive, which can facilitate sharing large documents like this Stewardship Plan. When that option is available, she will create a drive for the Commission.

Mr. Bergman asked if the report is sensitive to potential conflicts between biking, hiking, and wildlife. Chair Haynes replied yes.

d. Commission Functions/Roles

Chair Haynes noted the document shared by Councilor Hansel proposing changes to the Commission roles and functions in the City Code. He suggested everyone read it for the July meeting to discuss for adoption. Councilor Hansel said this is just to start a conversation; he removed redundancies, cleaned up language, and made some edits. He is open to suggestions for additions or deletions. He did not want to make substantive decisions about the role of the Commission. Chair Haynes said he thinks it is streamlined.

Chair Haynes made a suggestion. In Section 2-774 (Powers, duties and guidelines), he suggested not using the word *development*. Instead he suggest it should read, “(1) Promote the wise use of natural resources in the city and the protection of watershed resources of the city.”

Ms. Chalice suggested allowing the Planning Director a few days to make sure any edits are okay before Commission approval to send to Council. Councilor Hansel said he did review the enabling legislation and it seemed the City is doing everything necessary.

Mr. Reilly said the first two sections do not address the fact that there are two alternates on the Commission. Councilor Hansel replied that he used the same language as the Climate Committee; they recently revised their language and did not mention alternates because, he assumes, that prevents a limit on the number of possible alternates. Ms. Chalice will confirm if that is the case. Mr. Reilly asked if it should state how one becomes a member and details about term limits and reapplying. Councilor Hansel thinks that is left out because it is included in the governing documents that explain those more universal guidelines.

Councilor Hansel added that he reworded some portions to make clear that staff have no specific obligations to the Commission but are available in a support role.

The Commission will discuss these edits at the July meeting.

5) New or Other Business

Chair Haynes asked about land prioritization criteria. Ms. Chalice replied that she will ask for a meeting with Ms. Kessler to look at the database. She said the subcommittee can be involved as well. Chair Haynes said he wants to move forward without pressuring Ms. Chalice or Ms. Kessler because it is important information for other projects the Commission might do.

Chair Haynes noted there was an email from Liberty Utilities about putting a pipeline under the Ashuelot River along Winchester Street. Ms. Chalice said there is already a pipeline there; the application is to replace this crossing with an underground line, the river, perpendicular to the current pipeline along Winchester Street to create redundancy for future potential maintenance needs. She does not know the status of the application, but the pipeline would be at one discrete point location. She will find out if there is a comment period and if the Commission will see the application. Ms. Clark said that ARLAC would be reviewing the Permit by Notification for the pipeline at their meeting at 7:00 PM on June 19 at the Surry fire station. She will also share information with Ms. Chalice. Ms. Clark said the Commission does not comment on this permit because the drilling is under the river and therefore not affecting wetlands. Mr. Madison said that is a primary aquifer for Swanzey and other public water supplies downstream, so the Commission should be able to comment. Ms. Chalice will try to learn more.

Chair Haynes reported he has not yet called Anita Carol-Weldon at the Horatio Colony House Museum and Nature Preserve about sponsoring co-walks. Ms. Chalice spoke with Donna Hanscom, who was interested in the Commission's plans for education. Chair Haynes said he was considering the Babbidge Dam and Roxbury water source as a place for an interesting walk; they could learn about the scope of the project and it will be interesting because people are not usually allowed there. Ms. Chalice said she will work on this further now that she understands the context; she will find out the status of the project and the possibility of a walk.

Ms. Clark noted that ARLAC sent a letter to the Commission requesting a \$125 donation for E.coli testing; they send letters to all towns adjacent to the river requesting funds. ARLAC tests sites along the river monthly beginning in May. Ms. Chalice has not received that request yet, but will look into it as it is time sensitive; Ms. Clark said that amount is a part of the donation the Commission makes to ARLAC annually. Ms. Chalice did receive a request for funds from the Monadnock Conservancy. Both requests will be on the agenda in July.

6) Adjournment – Next Meeting Date Monday, July 16, 2018

Hearing no further business, Chair Haynes adjourned the meeting at 5:34 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker