

City of Keene
New Hampshire

MUNICIPAL SERVICES, FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, April 24, 2019

6:00 PM

Council Chambers

Members Present:

Janis O. Manwaring, Chair
Randy L. Filiault, Vice-Chair
Stephen L. Hooper
Gary P. Lamoureux

Staff Present:

Elizabeth A. Dragon, City Manager
Thomas P. Mullins, City Attorney
Andy Bohannon, Director of Parks, Recreation
& Facilities
Beth Fox, HR Director/Assistant City Manager

Members Not Present:

Robert B. Sutherland

Chair Manwaring called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM, welcomed the public, and explained the rules of procedure.

1) Periodic Report from Standing Boards or Commissions: Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board

Chair Manwaring welcomed the Director of Parks, Recreation, and Facilities, Andy Bohannon, who spoke on behalf of Arthur Winsor, Chair of the Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board. Mr. Bohannon provided a broad overview of the Board's work over the last year and their future plans. What the public knows as Ashuelot River Park along West Street is actually an arboretum, as defined by paths with cobbles and gardens before the bridge; the park begins at the Jonathan Daniels Trail and continues to the Apple Trail by Cheshire Medical Center. The purpose and vision of the Board is more focused on the arboretum. The park was created to promote, enhance, and maintain the Ashuelot River Park for its present and future use, enjoyment, and educational benefit for all residents of the City of Keene. The Board follows 10 functions and guidelines:

1. Promote the development of the Ashuelot River Park in accordance with the adopted vision statement and park plan.
2. Promote communication and exchange of ideas and concerns between park users, City staff and the City Council.
3. Make reports and recommendations to the Municipal Services, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee of the City Council and to the City staff with respect to management of the park.
4. Act as a publicity agent for the park by bringing the benefits of the park to the attention of the public.

5. Serve as an advocate for the interest of the park.
6. Serve as the catalyst for bringing private resources to the park and receiving gifts of money and property, both real and personal, in the name of the City, subject to the specific approval of the City Council.
7. Recommend the expenditure of trust funds.
8. Assist in developing and stating objectives and goals for park improvement.
9. Pursue the means of achieving the determined goals for improvement.
10. Perform such other related functions as required by the City Council or as requested by the City Manager.

Mr. Bohannon mentioned the West Street Dam because the Council will hear about it over the next year. In its function to serve as an advocate for the park, the Board is following those conversations and has expressed their opinion to Council in the past; they feel that removing the dam changes the essence of the park significantly. The Board understands the costs associated with repairing the dam and they will participate in advocacy discussions and reflect on how decisions impact the park.

Mr. Bohannon explained that he serves as a liaison for volunteers, who are managed and recruited largely by the Friends of Ashuelot River Park at the Arboretum (George Foscett, Chairman). Volunteers are essential to the park; for example, weeding was removed as a line item from the budget because volunteer efforts now suffice. Volunteer efforts occur throughout the year and are supported increasingly by the Old Homestead Garden Club, which was one of the original groups that established the park. The Friends of Ashuelot River Park at the Arboretum had their 501(c)(3) status renewed recently and have had a resurgence of large group volunteer efforts; the Friends are vital to the success of the park.

Mr. Bohannon demonstrated that the Board has worked with Bartlett Tree Experts to inventory all trees in the park to be managed as assets and made available to the public via the Arborscope software. Certified arborists studied the canopy, overall health, and growth of trees in the park. Arborscope is a non-proprietary online asset inventory software similar to Cartegraph, which the Council is familiar with; Mr. Bohannon is inquiring about moving Arborscope information into Cartegraph to further facilitate asset management. Arborscope will launch to the public this year via the Keene Parks and Recreation website. Mr. Bohannon demonstrated the software and how the 95 species of trees in the park have been classified as in good or fair condition; none are dead or in poor condition. The inventory occurred five years ago, but it is constantly updated. The software allows staff to see any trees' age class, condition, scientific name, size, and care priority (ranked 1-3). All trees are mapped and available via GIS, which facilitates asset management and mapping, and allows someone to locate a specific tree using a smart phone.

The Bartlett Tree Experts inventory of the park demonstrated that the total value of trees in the arboretum is \$335,819.70. Mr. Bohannon provided the example of River Birch trees in good condition valued at \$5,900. He demonstrated that he can generate reports in Arborscope for asset management. Mr. Bohannon has also negotiated adding the library

campus to this park's log in Arborscope, which will enhance the library and education. Once QR codes are attached to the trees, a smartphone can scan the code, which takes the user to a Virginia Tech website with information about that species. Completing this project and attaching QR codes to the trees is a focus of the Board because it supports the learning environment of the arboretum.

Mr. Bohannon continued by demonstrating assets in the park managed via Cartegraph, which makes maintenance easier. For example, when benches were removed for cleaning several years ago, some dedication plaques were not replaced on the correct benches; this software ensures that all assets are managed as replaced correctly. Cartegraph also helps to track direct costs of the park, such as the number of rubbish runs and instances of debris removal. Staff can also use the software to track completed tasks and requests.

Mr. Bohannon discussed a current initiative of the Board regarding the gazebo, which has been a focal point of the park since it was established in 1996. The gazebo is sturdy but attracts individuals who pose safety concerns. The public leave messages on a regular basis about negative activities that deter them from using the gazebo. He said that the gazebo could be grouted with cigarette butts, despite it being cleaned on a regular basis. Recently, the Board discussed replacing the gazebo with a pergola, which maintains a structure with less sitting area but would change the essence of the park. Mr. Bohannon is working with a landscape artist who wants to develop ideas to share with the Board. The topic has generated lengthy discussions on many meeting agendas because the Board wants to do the right thing.

Mr. Bohannon summarized other current Board initiatives:

- Councilor Hooper has worked with an Antioch University student, Ingrid Evans, who will acquire four bat houses to install in the park (this summer). This will contribute to mosquito and insect control.
- After a fall setback the irrigation system will be completed in the park. The new system will use City water instead of river water, which might not be available in the future if the dam is removed. The new infrastructure is efficient and inexpensive.
- The composting toilet that was closed several years ago is slated for removal and Mr. Bohannon is looking at costs. A portable toilet is brought in for any park events.
- The Board is following updates about the Ashuelot Street parking lot and how it will impact the arboretum; there have not been updates in six months.

Mr. Bohannon concluded displaying a photo of the park taken by Councilor Hooper and welcomed any questions. Chair Manwaring asked if this is the only park without a toilet. Mr. Bohannon replied that larger parks have toilets but smaller parks like Ellis-Harrison Park and Hickey-Desilets Park do not have toilets. There were conversations regarding the Ashuelot Street parking lot about a toilet, but that is off the table now. The current toilet location is ideal for users of the Jonathan Daniels Trail but is not ideal for police

patrols. Conversations about the toilet return consistently to the topic of safety, which has comprised significant Board meeting time.

Chair Manwaring asked if the Friends of Ashuelot River Park at the Arboretum fundraise for the park. Mr. Bohannon replied that they fundraised in the past but there was an embezzlement instance that caused the Friends to change their outlook and focus. They have returned to good standing now and are dedicated to managing the arboretum. They still sell cobbles via Parks and Recreation and the price will soon increase from \$50 to \$75.

Mr. Bohannon recalled that he frequently handles wedding requests administratively and reports them to the Board. Weddings of 15-20 people without tents and chairs are allowed in the park. However, the park is a public space and is not rentable; thus, their ceremony could be interrupted by other park activity.

Chair Manwaring asked the rules for dogs in the park and Mr. Bohannon noted this is the only park with written rules for dogs. Dogs are allowed within the arboretum but must remain on the trail and on a leash; dogs can be off-leash outside the arboretum. These rules were established between 2005-2007 and there are signs at the park entrance.

Councilor Hooper said he is honored to serve as a member of the Board and noted that Mr. Bohannon and Mr. Winsor have spearheaded wonderful work in the park. He noted the importance of volunteers in maintaining this treasured park. He asked how businesses can support the park. Mr. Bohannon said he seeks corporate assistance and he shares inquiries from businesses with Mr. Foskett; he sends volunteers to Ashuelot River Park because the Friends are always there and willing to supervise large work days or individuals who want to help. Additionally, the age range of volunteers is getting younger, which is positive for the future of the park. The Keene State College Links summer program for transitioning freshmen has been a successful volunteer example for the past five years.

Chair Manwaring recognized Councilor Mitch Greenwald who said, “the Ashuelot Dam, over my damn body will that disappear,” but he added that Mr. Bohannon is right to prepare for all alternatives. As a Justice of the Peace, he has conducted many ceremonies in the park with a 100% success rate so far. He asked if there is a cigarette receptacle in the gazebo and Mr. Bohannon said there is one at the entrance; Councilor Greenwald said it has to be easy for people or they will not use it. He continued saying bathrooms are something the Council has heard a lot about; he can recommend a one-month porta potty service that is an easy and inexpensive short-term solution. Mr. Bohannon said he would take the recommendation under advisement.

The City Attorney asked if the park was established with multiple grants. Mr. Bohannon said the Friends originally had non-profit status, which they used to establish the park and gift the City through two trust funds: one for work above and beyond normal park maintenance (e.g., laying mulch) and another that was nearly completely utilized for the irrigation project. Thus, there is one fund moving forward that still allows for expansion.

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This park does not significantly impact the Parks and Recreation operating budget. The Friends used the Land and Water Conservation fund to establish the park in perpetuity. Mr. Winsor was a part of establishing the park and it is great to have that history at meetings to reflect the original vision of the park.

Councilor Lamoureux made the following motions which was seconded by Councilor Filiault:

On a vote of 4-0, the Municipal Services, Facilities & Infrastructure Committee accepted the periodic report on the Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board as informational.

2) Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Chair Manwaring adjourned the meeting at 6:42 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katryna Kibler, Minute Taker

Additional edits by: Patricia Little. City Clerk