

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, April 15, 2019

4:30 PM

2nd Floor Conference Room,
City Hall

Members Present:

Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Chair
Councilor George Hansel
Brian Reilly
Art Walker
Tom Haynes, Alternate

Staff Present:

Rhett Lamb, Community Development
Director/Assistant City Manager

Members Not Present:

Eloise Clark
Denise Burchsted
Ken Bergman
Steven Bill, Alternate

1) **Call to Order**

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 4:32 PM.

2) **Approval of Meeting Minutes – March 18, 2019**

Mr. Haynes noted corrections: 1) on page 5/11 the word *cities* should be replaced with *City departments* in the following sentence, “Mr. Haynes reported that one of the ideas was to reach out to the partners of other cities and organizations.” 2) On page 3/11 the words *the Conservation fund and* should be omitted from the following sentence, “Mr. Lamb reported they are ready to move forward to the transfer of the property using the Conservation fund and the Land Use Change Tax Fund.”

Mr. Haynes moved to approve the Minutes of March 18, 2019 as amended, which Mr. Walker seconded and the Conservation Commission carried unanimously.

3) **Informational**

a. **West Street Dam – Rhode Island School of Design**

Mr. Lamb reported that the interdisciplinary research team from the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and University of New Hampshire (among others) are working on the scope of work the City provided in the fall. They are studying the best methods for public communication about dams, which was presented to the Commission last year. Council

approved the scope of work to begin April 2019 but the research team is not ready and the project will now commence at the end of May. One reason for project delay is the City's request that the four options be reviewed from a cost and engineering standpoint before they are presented to the public. The research team will engage the public in an informal decision making process and present those four options for dam repair/replacement/removal. Mr. Haynes noted they will use a visual modeling process at the public meetings.

The team will continue coordinating with the Community Development and Public Works departments to organize the public meeting process in May/June. The Chairman suggested hosting the public engagements near the dam, if possible, which would facilitate a site visit as a part of the activity. Mr. Lamb will begin inquiring about the following locations suggested:

- A recreation room on Castle Street
- Southwest Regional Planning Commission
- Antioch University Community Room
- The vacant storefront next to Mascoma Savings Bank
- Elm City Bagel (while closed in the evening)

When the events are scheduled, the Commission will be notified.

b. Subcommittee Reports

The Chairman reported that the Aquatic Resource Mitigation subcommittee hopes to meet again and begin preparations for any potential projects. He may seek a new subcommittee member if Ms. Burchsted is unavailable.

Mr. Haynes said the education subcommittee hopes to meet soon. He attended the Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board (ARPAB) meeting, which demonstrated active interest in partnerships for education and outreach in the park. Mr. Haynes welcomed possible partnerships on behalf of the Commission and he was invited to continue visiting the ARPAB.

4) Discussion Items

a. Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Plan

Mr. Lamb recalled that this item has been on the agenda since January 2019 when the Commission began reviewing drafts of the plan. The Commission's comments were incorporated in the plan, and in March, the draft plan was presented for public input. On April 18, Mr. Littleton will present the final proposed plan to Council, who will refer it to the Municipal Services, Facilities & Infrastructure (MSFI) Committee on April 24. The MSFI Committee will review the plan and vote to recommend Council accept or deny it; Council will vote to adopt the plan or not on May 2. The Commission does not need to take a formal stance on the plan because there was a separate ad hoc committee for this plan, which involved the Commission in many aspects.

The Chairman said his instinct was that the Commission should not take a position on the plan because there were enough members absent with differing views on its elements. He is uncomfortable speaking for everyone. Mr. Haynes stated he thinks the Commission can and should take a position because: 1) the Commission requested the plan and paid to develop it, 2) the Commission wants to be seen as a body that promotes stewardship (even though Parks & Recreation will oversee the plan), and 3) if the Commission appears unsure and does not take a position on a plan they paid for, the Council could be concerned about accepting the plan. Councilor Hansel said each member does not have to endorse everything in the report unanimously for the Commission to take a position. He thinks the Commission should take a position on the report they helped fund and were engaged in creating; if there is concern about portions that deserve more dialogue, the Commission can state that. Mr. Reilly agreed and thinks the Commission is unanimous in support of this plan and any reservations can be presented for Council consideration.

Mr. Lamb said there can be a vote authorizing staff and the Chair to write a letter of support that the Commission agrees upon. Mr. Walker said there might need to be another level of decision making on the recreation concerns as the plan is applied; neighbors might have reservations throughout the process. Councilor Hansel agreed and suggested the following statement: *Throughout this stewardship plan development process, the Conservation Commission has been in favor of proactively managing this property in a way to benefit the entire community. The report goes a long way toward that goal but more public dialogue is needed on the specifics of any project that is proposed in the future.*

Mr. Lamb recalled that the plan recommends the City create a formal committee focused on stewardship. He thinks such a committee will be important moving forward to enact this plan and others. The Commission can endorse that aspect of the plan and state their interest in having one member on that new committee. Mr. Haynes stated he feels the Commission should strongly endorse creating this stewardship committee in the letter.

In addition to the letter, Commission members can attend the upcoming MSFI and Council public hearings to speak about the plan. Mr. Haynes plans to attend those meetings and can read any statement. The Commission agreed a letter is the best way to expressed the nuanced feelings about the plan. Mr. Lamb summarized the key points for the letter he and the Chairman will write: The Commission is in favor of active management and the principles that are laid out in the plan, the report goes a long way to meet the specific interests identified in the plan, and more public dialogue will be needed as implementation of the plan moves forward.

At the Council meeting, Mr. Littleton will provide a 10 to 15-minute presentation. Mr. Lamb has reiterated to Mr. Littleton the need to be very specific and state that forest management is taking trees for the right purpose and active management means there will be forestry in Goose Pond because it is good for the forest. Because the report is done professionally, he does not anticipate a vote requiring more than one Council cycle, despite the length of the report. Mr. Lamb will check-in with the ad hoc committee to find out if they will meet again and to share the timeline.

The Commission expressed their support for the Chairman and Mr. Lamb to draft a letter; Mr. Haynes offered to help as well if needed. Mr. Haynes moved for the Commission to draft a letter to present to City Council on the Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Plan, which Councilor Hansel seconded and the Conservation Commission carried unanimously.

b. Community Development Department Mission Statement

The Chairman said he read Mr. Bergman's email and asked how this should continue; the suggestion is to add "and the environment" to the end of the Community Development Department's mission statement. Mr. Lamb recalled how the Community Development department and its mission statement were formed: annually, every department writes an operating budget and evaluates its charge/mission/direction for that year to meet both primary responsibilities and fiscal objectives. In 2018 the Planning, Code Enforcement/Inspection, and Health Departments merged and the language cited in the meeting packet was used to reflect this new departments' mission. He is unsure why the environment was not included in the new statement. As the department head, he is comfortable making that revision moving into next year's budget; it is an easy change for him that reflects the importance of the environment in the City's overall goals in the Comprehensive Master Plan. He recalled the commitment of City staff to value everyone obtain input, inform the public, continually assess infrastructure, and establish priorities (VOICE). While Keene is a small City, there are actually 240 employees in 15 different industries.

c. Commission Priorities

The Chairman said he is waiting until a larger meeting turnout so there can be a bigger discussion of priorities. He suggested tabling this matter until the May meeting.

The Chairman said he reached out to the Monadnock Conservancy about an opportunity to learn how they monitor easements. If interested, a Commission member could meet one of their staff and walk through a property to learn methods and best practices for monitoring. Mr. Haynes is interested in working with a member of the Conservancy on this effort.

Councilor Hansel said he spoke with someone who oversees the Goose Pond easement from the Society for the Protection of NH Forests, which is looking to reactivate this part of the state. He suggested inviting one of their members to present to the Commission on their work. The Chairman agreed and Mr. Lamb will inquire.

5) New or Other Business

Mr. Haynes asked for an update on the Beaugard property. Mr. Lamb said he met with Mr. Beaugard to review the final sale for transfer but it is not yet complete. Mr. Haynes said he and Ms. Clark discussed outreach opportunities on the property once the sale is

complete. Mr. Lamb noted there might be a separate public process if Mr. Beauregard requests that the property be named after his father; there may be opportunities for outreach related to that naming.

The Chairman noted he is a member of the Keene Beyond Plastics group and he is personally researching how to get water bodies tested for microplastics (something the Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee does not test for). He suggested this Commission might be interested as he learns more about testing possibilities.

6) Adjournment

Hearing no further business, The Chairman adjourned the meeting at 5:12 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker