

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, May 20, 2019

4:30 PM

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

Members Present:

Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Chair
Eloise Clark, Vice Chair
Councilor George Hansel
Ken Bergman
Art Walker
Tom Haynes, Alternate

Staff Present:

Rhett Lamb, Community Development
Director

Members Not Present:

Denise Burchsted
Brian Reilly
Steven Bill, Alternate

1) Call to Order

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM.

2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – April 15, 2019

The Chairman noted the meeting start time should change from 4:02 to 4:30 PM.

Mr. Haynes noted a correction on page 4/10, where the phrase, “*He visited the Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board...*” should instead say, “*He attended the Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board meeting.*”

Mr. Lamb recalled that when a Commission member is absent, the Chairman should appoint an alternate to vote. At this meeting, the Chairman appointed Mr. Haynes as a voting member.

Councilor Hansel moved to approve the minutes of April 15, 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 recalled that staff has worked with the consortium of researchers—in particular from the Rhode Island School of Design—studying public decision making about dams. The researchers and staff are facilitating a public engagement session on June 11 from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM at the Recreation Center. Despite not sponsoring the event, Mr. Lamb encouraged Commission members to participate. The researchers will present the public with (approximately) five different future scenarios for the West Street Dam from leaving the dam alone, to introducing fish diversion opportunities, to removing the dam entirely. Mr. Haynes said he has seen some of the visual representations of dam options the researchers developed, which Mr. Lamb said are computer generated visualizations of how each dam option would look and work. Even though this dam is very important and divisive in Keene, Mr. Lamb said this forum is for the research team to learn about effective decision making around dams, but it still has the potential to help people decide what projects to support in the future. The outcome of the forum is arguably unimportant because City decisions about the dam are still several years out.

Mr. Bergman asked if the researchers will clarify to the public participants that this is a not a decision making process. Mr. Lamb replied in the affirmative and added that he and Councilor Hansel wrote a memo to the Municipal Services, Facilities & Infrastructure Committee clarifying the research purpose of this event, though there would still undoubtedly be confusion, which can ultimately promote further discussion.

b. Subcommittee Reports

Mr. Haynes recalled that he and Ms. Clark are working on the Education and Outreach Subcommittee. They met a few months ago to brainstorm near- and long-term possibilities and identified some targeted areas to pursue, which Mr. Haynes discussed with the Commission:

1. Beech Hill:
 - a. An event to commemorate acquiring the Beauregard property (pending), which will enhance conservation of Beech Hill.
2. Goose Pond:
 - a. A tour or hike in early fall, with an ultimate goal of having a similar event each season to introduce people to the park throughout the year.
 - b. Pursuing an opportunity to collaborate with the New England Mountain Bike Association for events such as bike tours or to discuss ethics of using the park recreationally.
 - c. An opportunity to generate baseline data on bird populations to support the goal of protecting wildlife in the stewardship plan. Timber harvesting is also a part of the stewardship plan and bird data will allow the Commission to track that stewardship goal as cutting begins. This presents an opportunity to collaborate with local groups and schools.
3. Airport:
 - a. From recreational use (e.g., birding) of Airport Road, to wetland ecology, to the Waste Water Treatment Plant, there are opportunities for public education and outreach.
4. Ladies' Wildwood & Dinsmoor Woods Parks:
 - a. The Director of Parks & Recreation indicated these parks are a priority because they have evolved into monocultures and similar to Goose Pond, there might be opportunities to enhance diversity and thus minimize risks to species in the park.
5. Transfer Station:
 - a. The Director of Parks & Recreation also mentioned opportunities at the Transfer Station where four or five acres of forest were cut to accommodate a greenhouse fish farm that never came to be. The Commission could have a role in outreach opportunities toward restoration of the denuded landscape.

The Director of Parks & Recreation also indicated to Mr. Haynes that Robin Hood Park and its connection to the Beech Hill plan is a good location for the next stewardship plan; following the Goose Pond Stewardship Plan, he is happy with the Commission creating stewardship plans for City lands.

Mr. Bergman expressed support for a bird study at Goose Pond and suggested Antioch University students could be knowledgeable partners for education and research in the forest. He was previously also an outside mentor to an Antioch student focused on ornithology. Mr. Haynes agreed that Mr. Bergman would be an ideal conduit for that project. Mr. Bergman also shared that he frequents Airport Road as a recreational birder, as many others do. He spoke with Councilor Steve Hooper about the Airport Master Plan priority to enclose the runways with a chain link fence with barbed wire at the top. There are two proposals for the fence: 1) placed

closer to the end of the north runway with impacts on wetlands, and 2) along the pavement of Airport Road, which will minimize wetland impacts but eliminate parking and photography for birders and safe shoulder recreational walking space used actively by the Edgewood neighbors. Councilor Hooper informed Mr. Bergman that no design or construction would begin until 2020 at the earliest. The fence is an FAA mandate. Councilor Hansel, who chaired the committee tasked with developing the Airport Master (AMP), said that the fence project is to minimize demonstrated threats that wildlife pose to aviation; he confirmed that project is not in the capital budget until fiscal year 2020/2021. Mr. Lamb confirmed that no plans are yet developed but a wetlands permit will be necessary regardless and there could be a conflict between preserving wetlands and maintaining recreation.

Mr. Haynes said the subcommittee would work these ideas into something more tangible. Mr. Bergman agreed to share the fence maps from the AMP with the Committee. Councilor Hansel said this conversation is interesting because criteria like wildlife, wetlands, and conflicts between conservation and recreation should be the impetus of a stewardship plan. He said there could be motivating factors to support a stewardship plan at the airport.

Chair Von Plinsky said the Aquatic Resource Mitigation (ARM) Subcommittee has not met in some time. He no longer thinks the subcommittee name suits it because it has evolved more into a priorities ranking. This evolution and the Chairman's conversations with the Monadnock Conservancy clarified the need for a subcommittee focused on prioritizing specific areas of town like the airport, into a readily available list for when ARM funds become available. These priorities can also help when other grants and opportunities arise, such as the Drinking Water and Ground Water Trust Fund, which has different criteria than the ARM fund but represents a significant pool of funds. The Chairman said that if the subcommittee meets again soon they could focus on mapping these priority areas.

4) Discussion Items

a. Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee (ARLAC) donation

Mr. Lamb noted \$1,375 remaining in the Commission's fiscal year 2019 budget and any unused funds will revert to the City's General Fund and do not roll over into the Commission's 2020 budget. ARLAC requested \$125 as in past years for water quality testing of the Ashuelot River. Ms. Clark noted that ARLAC is also seeking donations toward replacing pH meters, which cost \$1,500. Mr. Haynes asked if the budget ends June 31 and Mr. Lamb replied in the affirmative. The Chairman confirmed the only remaining expense is the Society for Protection of NH Forests membership and said it makes sense to contribute for the pH meters as well because the remaining funds go back into the General Fund on July 1 if unused.

Mr. Haynes moved to contribute \$250 to ARLAC for \$125 for E.coli testing and \$125 for pH meters, which Councilor Hansel seconded.

With questions if that amount was sufficient, Councilor Hansel withdrew his second and Mr. Haynes withdrew his motion. Mr. Haynes agreed the Commission could make a nicer donation if the budget is unspent in the next few months since the budget does not roll over; Mr. Bergman agreed. The Chairman also recalled that by population, Keene is the greatest beneficiary of ARLAC's work. Regarding the Society for Protection of NH Forests membership, Mr. Lamb and Ms. Clark agreed that the membership is only \$40-\$50 and Ms. Clark said the Commission should pay that membership because the Society monitors Goose Pond.

The Commission continued discussing donation possibilities with the remaining budget and arrived at the following motion, noting that it makes sense to assist ARLAC's immediate needs, and agreed to revisit the remaining budget in June and augment the donation if possible.

Chairman Von Plinsky moved for the Conservation Commission to donate \$625 to ARLAC: \$500 for pH pumps and \$125 for E.coli monitoring, which Ms. Clark seconded. The motion passed with a unanimous vote.

The Chairman asked Ms. Clark who to contact about testing the Ashuelot River for micro plastics; broken down plastics photo degrade into smaller and smaller pieces. Ms. Clark suggested contacting Barbara Skully and Mr. Bergman suggested Ms. Burchsted.

b. Society for the Protection of NH Forests membership dues

The Commission agreed it is odd the reminder letter did not list the membership cost. Mr. Lamb believed the Commission paid \$45 last year and said the matter could be tabled until the June meeting.

Councilor Hansel moved for the Conservation Commission to send \$45 to the Society for the Protection of NH Forests, which Mr. Haynes seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

c. Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Plan implementation ideas

Chair Von Plinsky said now that Council adopted the stewardship plan it is time to do something with it. The plan suggested forming a Stewardship Committee to handle the endowment and other pond issues. He asked if the Commission should take on that responsibility or develop a dedicated Committee.

Mr. Haynes suggested that Andy Bohannon, Director of Parks & Recreation, should be a part of this conversation because he oversees Goose Pond and Mr. Haynes encouraged Mr. Bohannon to develop a Stewardship Committee to enhance outreach potential. Mr. Walker said Mr. Bohannon supervises activities like seasonal hikes that the Commission implemented. The Chairman agreed to work with Mr. Bohannon; regarding a Stewardship Committee, he does not think that is something the Commission should take on. Ms. Clark recalled that the plan recommended one member of the Commission serve on the Stewardship Committee.

Mr. Lamb said there is a list of significant actions in the Stewardship Plan starting at a list for 10 years. For instance, the first four actions are: 1) mark boundary lines, 2) Endowment, 3) Stewardship Committee, 4) improve property access. The actions continue into more active forest management pieces with compartments of work to do. As this plan comes out of City Council, Mr. Lamb said that Mr. Bohannon owns this plan to some degree but the Commission still has a significant role to play. He said Mr. Bohannon will handle the long-term forest management but the endowment should be a collaboration between Parks & Recreation and the Conservation Commission. Mr. Bergman recalled that the plan called for Parks & Recreation to develop an Outdoor Education Recreation Committee, which Mr. Lamb said is a more detailed element versus the 10-year broader actions. Mr. Lamb suggested considering if the Commission could take on a role on some of this work to avoid creating a new Committee; the City is hesitant to support new public bodies and the staff support they require.

Mr. Haynes suggested there could be a subcommittee of the Commission to take these actions. Mr. Lamb said it depends on what the Commission wants to accomplish. For example, a

Stewardship Committee warrants being a second group because it should be comprised of stakeholders immediately affected by decisions; like an abutter, a trails expert, and the mountain bikers. The Commission agreed this classic model of diverse citizen participation that will be a unique and good way to get actions moving on the list of tasks in the plan. Mr. Walker noted that this would be a complex and diverse Advisory Committee unlike anything he has seen in the City. Mr. Lamb agreed that it is broad and said the only similar one is the Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board, which is a City-created Board dedicated to a specific parcel.

Mr. Bergman asked about the contract for easement management with the Society for Protection of NH Forests, for which Mr. Lamb said the Commission does not pay. Mr. Haynes said when an easement is established there is an up-front contribution to cover future long-term expenses. Mr. Lamb thinks the endowment fund is for local improvements that help public access and Mr. Haynes agreed that any timber management would stay to support the park.

The Chairman was hesitant for the Commission to take on a task as big as implementing the plan but thinks the Commission can help Mr. Bohannon and other City staff to establish the Stewardship Committee. The Chairman suggested inviting Mr. Bohannon, someone from the New England Mountain Bike Association, and other stakeholders to the June meeting to work on details of what this public body should look like. Ultimately, he said it is the City Council's decision to form the Stewardship Committee but the Commission can advise on stakeholders and other details; Mr. Haynes agreed. Mr. Lamb clarified that a subcommittee of this Commission requires virtually the same research and staff time as a regular open meeting. Mr. Lamb added it might be clear over time that this new committee only needs to operate for a few key years to sell the idea of an endowment. Mr. Haynes agreed the new committee could play an outreach role when chainsaws start running, which Mr. Bergman said could be mitigated, perhaps, by signs in the park warning and educating on timber harvest.

A lot of work will fall to staff and that is ok, but the Commission could have this initial convening role to determine the best ways to pick priorities and create momentum behind them. Mr. Lamb will work with staff to invite stakeholders to the June meeting, such as members of the Society for Protection of NH Forests (who own the easement) and members of the old Goose Pond advisory group. There will be trails money for the Parks & Recreation Department this year so it might be a good time to build this framework.

Mr. Lamb will move forward with invitations to the June meeting with the immediate priorities in mind because tasks like a boundary survey and improving a road, which require money as Mr. Haynes noted. Mr. Bergman added that monitoring the effects of timber harvesting on birds means starting baseline monitoring now before harvesting begins, which means reaching out to sources like Antioch and others because it has to be done in a systematic reproducible way for several years. Ms. Clark noted that SPNHF (Society for the Protection of NH Forests) did all the boundary work but did not mark very well, which would be a reason to contact them.

d. Community Development Mission Statement

Mr. Lamb recalled that Mr. Bergman initiated this idea to add the phrase “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/Inspections, and Health Departments merged and the language cited in the meeting packet was used to reflect this new department’s 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. The Finance, Organization & Personnel Committee already reviewed this year’s budget, so this administrative and editorial change will be reevaluated in the next budget cycle and Mr. Lamb thinks he has enough information captured in the April minutes to do so. Ultimately, it is the City Manager’s budget and City Council will approve any changes.

e. Easement monitoring

The Chairman recalled speaking with a Monadnock Conservancy representative who provided good resources (in the meeting packet) to start monitoring the five easements the City holds. He hoped to form an informal group of Commission members to walk the easements together on a regular basis. Monitoring the easements requires very little prep work, such as talking to the landowner, followed by walking in the woods and taking photos. He suggested monitoring a new property every few months and perhaps starting at the end of summer to avoid vegetation and insects. The Chairman was happy to take the lead on this work and Mr. Bergman expressed interest in helping. Mr. Lamb will share a list of easements that date to a variety of times and are cases where the City owns the easement but not the land. Examples include Concord Hill in 1987, the Emily Shaw property, two recent easements resulting from wetland permits in the late 1990s—Blackbird Field and NH Gas property that was never developed at the end of Production Avenue. The final easement is Cheshire Medical Center, which Mr. Lamb is unsure the project it was associated with ever occurred regarding a wetland fill project prior to the ARM fund process. Before the ARM fund, developers had to mitigate wetland impacts such as developing an easement somewhere or recreating a wetland somewhere. With the ARM fund, developers can pay for mitigation. Ms. Clark questioned a parcel off Darling Court, which Mr. Lamb said is a Conservation Residential Development (limited development) that has no easement but is dedicated as open space and preserved by a homeowners association.

Mr. Lamb will share the list of easement details, though the Commission agreed to table monitoring until the end of summer. Mr. Bergman asked if there are concerns or clauses in the easements about invasive species to address more prudently sooner. The Chairman said the first step of the process is to look through the easement contracts to determine priorities. Mr. Lamb said most monitoring is typical for physical encroachment or changes in land use.

5) New or Other

Mr. Haynes asked for an update on the Beaugard property. Mr. Lamb said the closing is scheduled in June.

Mr. Haynes recalled the Stacey Cole property on the border of Keene and Marlborough on RT-101, which was gifted to the City. Mr. Lamb said the City owns the land that the Commission might want to consider for stewardship. Ms. Clark said it is substantial at nearly 240 acres.

Mr. Lamb agreed it would be good to mention to Mr. Bohannon when developing the next Stewardship Plan list.

Ms. Clark referred to the northwest corner of Keene where there are large chunks of land contiguous with Goose Pond that flow into Gilsum, which the Nature Conservancy is trying to raise \$3 million to protect. There is another parcel the Conservancy owns near Goose Pond that she will communicate with ARLAC members about; Mr. Lamb heard it was for sale in Keene. The land was logged heavily throughout the years and Mr. Haynes said the land must be a high priority if the Nature Conservancy is involved. Ms. Clark agreed that the parcels are high on the Wildlife Action Plan.

Mr. Bergman recalled that the Commission was awaiting a list/database of undeveloped City land. Ms. Clark said the Friends of Open Space have a list from the City and Mr. Haynes recalled the Commission trying previously to prioritize City-owned property. The Chairman agreed that having a list and a map would be helpful to take action on many efforts. The Chairman segued into needing members for the ARM subcommittee, which Mr. Bergman has the expertise to contribute. Mr. Bergman agreed to discuss the possibility when Mr. Lamb produces the agreed upon list. Ms. Clark will share her list with the Commission to compare. Mr. Lamb said the Commission would likely be most interested in conservation lands that have no real definition, but the City owns lands for a variety of purposes, including land outside Keene. Ms. Clark recommended that Dick Berry might have the information in addition to Will Schoeffmann. Mr. Lamb believed he could recreate the information.

6) Next meeting – June 17, 2019

7) Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Chair Von Plinsky adjourned the meeting at 5:43 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katrina Kibler, Minute Taker May 27, 2019

Reviewed by Rhett Lamb, ACM/Community Development Director
Edits, Lee Langella