

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, May 13, 2019

8:00 AM

Recreation Center, Room 12

Members Present:

Arthur Winsor, Chair
Councilor Steve Hooper
Paul Bocko
Dave Whaley
Judy Sadoski (Arrived Late)

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Director of Parks, Recreation
& Facilities

Members Not Present:

George Foskett

1) Welcome & Call to Order

Chair Winsor called the meeting to order at 8:04 AM and welcomed a guest from Antioch University New England (AUNE), Ingrid Evans.

2) Approval of April 9, 2019 Minutes

Mr. Whaley moved to approve the minutes of April 9, 2019, which Councilor Hooper seconded and the Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board carried unanimously.

3) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon referred to the budget listed in the meeting packet, reflecting the most recent line item of \$1,500 for the Arborscope software three-year agreement. He knows spring clean-up has occurred but he has not yet received the bill; his primary focus is laying mulch.

4) MSFI Presentation April 24 Recap

On April 24, Mr. Bohannon made the annual presentation about Board activities to the City Council Municipal Services, Facilities & Infrastructure (MSFI) Committee; Councilor Hooper is a member of the MSFI Committee. At the presentation, Mr. Bohannon reminded the MSFI Committee of the Board's functions, the new Arborscope software (highlighted the overall value of trees in the park of more than \$335,000), and park asset management in Cartegraph. He also reported on current Board initiatives: bat houses, irrigation system, QR code installation, landscaping, composting toilet, the Ashuelot Street parking lot, and the

West Street Dam. Councilor Hooper thought it was a wonderful report and he mentioned a public comment during the presentation from City Councilor Mitch Greenwald, who suggested a permanent portable toilet in the park instead of bringing them in for special events. Otherwise, the responses to the presentation were very positive and appreciative; Councilors were pleased to know the value of the park.

Chair Winsor recalled that this Board has not favored portable toilets in the past. Mr. Whaley asked why Councilor Greenwald would make that suggestion. Councilor Hooper replied that there have been significant conversations in the City on public restrooms; some have goals to make facilities available to show care for the public. Mr. Bohannon noted that Wheelock and Robin Hood parks each have public toilets; this is logical, though, because these parks are used more actively. Ashuelot River Park has more passive activity and there are many nearby establishments, some of which offer public restrooms. He said this is an ongoing challenge.

5) Friends of Ashuelot River Park Report

Mr. Foskett was absent from the meeting but Mr. Bohannon reported that the Friends received their 501(c)(3) non-profit status back from the state, which is a positive step in the right direction.

6) Park Discussion

a. Bat Houses Request

Chair Winsor welcomed Ms. Evans, an AUNE student, who initiated the bat house project in the park. The goal of her project is to install bat houses along the Ashuelot River. Her colleagues at AUNE conducted a suitability model based on the best bat habitat. Bats eat mosquitoes, which spread pathogens and other blood borne diseases. By creating more habitat for the little and big brown bats, the houses will serve to reduce mosquito presence in the City, and therefore the diseases they spread.

Bat houses are designed based on the Bat Conservation Management Guide & Protocols. These house designs are generic for the whole US and small amendments can be made for specific species. The houses are painted darker colors to retain heat in the winter and houses are oriented south to get more light. Ms. Evans shared a map that indicates the seven places in the park most suitable for bat houses. Seven houses in the park would be excessive and redundant as each can hold up to 50 bats if that many were present; four houses are planned for the park in the most ideal locations to have minimal human disturbance and sufficient light. The little brown bat males and females roost separately. The four proposed bat houses will provide enough habitat for the estimated bat population in the area. Little brown bats have been impacted significantly by white nose disease, though biologists believe they have begun developing genetic resistance.

Mr. Bocko referred to the location labeled #1 on the map, which he said is not ideal. Approximately 22 years ago, a bat house was installed at that location with the Rachel Marshall project. He did not monitor the house, so he is unsure if it was successful. Ms. Evans said her colleagues at AUNE monitor other bat houses using scope cameras to count

bats inside; she does not have that technology but can count approximately using a flash light. She also showed an educational sign her colleagues developed for bat houses at Glover's Ledge, an AUNE property in Langdon, NH. Peter Poanessa of Keene has offered to make four educational signs to accompany the bat houses for free. The signs will be aluminum with a foam core to increase durability and minimize vandalism.

Mr. Whaley asked the bat population size in the City. Ms. Evans did not know a specific census but she thinks the population is larger than people expect, with bats residing in backyard trees and attics. If bats are pushed out of those habitats, they will have nowhere to go, and thus make the bat houses very valuable. She said many people are fearful of bats because they can carry rabies. Chair Winsor and other Board members welcomed the bat houses because they know bats help control mosquito populations.

Ms. Evans brought a bat house to the meeting. The houses have three chambers so that males and females can hibernate separately in the same house. The house she showed was built using a kit purchased online that includes all necessary pieces. Three more houses are needed. Ms. Sadoski asked if the rough edges of plywood on the house should be smoothed. Ms. Evans replied that there is sealant caulking inside the house and she has realized an additional sealant layer is necessary under the asphalt shingles. The lifespan of the houses exposed to weather is approximately 10 years. She showed a photo of a bat house roof damaged in a storm, but those are the worst case scenarios. The houses require little to no long-term maintenance because the bat excrement falls from the bottom; moths could build-up in the house that would need to be cleaned out occasionally.

The kits cost \$64 with an additional \$20 shipping cost; thus the total cost of each house is \$84. Chair Winsor, Ms. Sadoski, and Mr. Whaley offered to each pay for one of the three remaining bat houses; Mr. Bocko also agreed to donate the same \$84 for any additional costs. Councilor Hooper said additional donations are welcome because they still need to pay for the 16' high 4X4 white pine pillars the houses will be installed on (cedar is too expensive); each pillar should cost approximately \$25. To protect from critters, houses are not installed on trees. Board members who wish to donate for the bat house project should submit to Mr. Bohannon cash or checks made payable to the City of Keene. In this way, members are making individual donations to the park budget, from which the houses and pillars can be purchased. There are also remaining funds likely in the Board's budget miscellaneous line item. Mr. Bohannon said Mr. Poanessa has the City logo to put on the signs as well. Ms. Evans hopes the signs could display QR codes in the future that links to a website with bat facts. While the houses will be 16' high above the ground, the signs will be at eye-level. Chair Winsor suggested a gentleman in Swanzey who has rough cut hemlock they may be willing to donate for the project. The Board agreed that hemlock would be a more sustainable choice.

Ms. Evans is happy to share the maps and reports digitally. She hopes in the future there could be educational guided tours that educate the public on bats; Mr. Bocko said that could be a part of the Horatio Colony Nature Preserve funded public program series next year, for which he is always seeking new partners. Mr. Bocko asked how Ms. Evans will choose the four locations for houses. She replied that is the will of the City; she and Mr.

Bohannon will work together to find the best places away from noise and human activity. Mr. Bocko asked where the bats normally roost and Ms. Evans noted they seek trees like shag bark hickory, where the bark provides shelter. The Board thanked Ms. Evans for her hard work improving wildlife habitat in the park.

b. Landscape Design Information

Mr. Bohannon has discussed possible landscaping for the park with a gentleman interested particularly in the gazebo area. The landscape designer shared concern that removing the gazebo will create a straight walk through the park with no obstructions. To mitigate this concern, he suggested a pergola with benches. Regarding landscape specifically, the gentleman suggests work in the bed near the bench surrounded by fir trees (by the bank parking lot); that bed is overgrown and the fir trees need to be moved to thrive again. The landscape designer said he can use a bobcat to move trees so they can mature individually without competition from others. The conversation did not extend to other parts of the arboretum. This conversation parallels the Friends and the Old Homestead Garden Club's (OHGC) intention to move and trim trees. It is a good sign to see two groups working on the same effort. The Board has to decide to budget for this gentleman's services or allow the tree changes to occur naturally.

Ms. Sadoski asked the OHGC timeline for tree work. Mr. Bohannon said the park clean-up day is May 18 and some OHGC members will be there; they have started trimming but do not have a timeline for moving things. Mr. Bohannon noted the OHGC does not have equipment, so they would rely on City services and equipment. Mr. Bohannon was surprised at the landscape designer's proposed fee, which was very reasonable. He believes the designer cares about and wants to make an impact on the park, especially in the form of public art. Mr. Bohannon also noted the City has a dump site at 560 Main Street (old Public Works building), where a lot of granite pieces were dumped that Mr. Bohannon has installed as seating at the library, for example. If the landscape designer looked for granite pieces for art, the City could likely provide it.

Per the Board's request, Mr. Bohannon will invite the landscape designer to the June meeting.

c. Park Clean-Up: May 18, 9am-12pm

Mr. Bohannon expects 30-40 members of the Next Level Church to volunteer at the event, which they also participated in last year for their "Serve the City" day. He and Mr. Foskett walked through the park recently and identified various project for volunteers. Board members are also invited to the work day and volunteers can help with their plots. Primarily, volunteers will be tasked to work on cobbles around benches, which have been growing in; volunteers will clean the stones and place fresh stone dust to prevent weeds. When that cobble work is complete, there is plenty of trimming work. Mr. Bocko noted the HCNP Quest Fest is the same day and involves family treasure hunting in the park but the event is in the afternoon.

d. **Irrigation**

Mr. Bohannon reported he asked the contractors to complete work at the Wheelock Park baseball fields first. They should be completing the irrigation work at Ashuelot River Park the week of this meeting. Councilor Hooper noted truck tracks in the park and asked who is responsible for correcting it. Mr. Bohannon replied that the irrigation company is responsible for returning the park to the condition they found it, which is part of the reason they were delayed at Wheelock; the City is holding them to a high standard.

e. **Lighting Update**

Mr. Bohannon recalled that the Board paid for new lighting in 2018. He noticed some lights coming on inconsistently and Hamblet Electric found a fried piece of equipment, which they are replacing. He asked Hamblet about the two 30' high poles in the park with two flood lights on each. Mr. Bohannon asked them to replace and wires and fixtures from metal-halide to LED, which will be brighter, less expensive, and make a big impact. He has seen the police doing foot patrols in the park, which is welcomed and appreciated.

f. **West Street Dam**

Mr. Bohannon said staff met last week with the researchers from Rhode Island School of Design, who presented their next steps. A public forum is scheduled on June 11, 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM at the Recreation Center. It is a long program because of how it is structured. Researchers will present various removal options, with photos of dams that have had the same treatment; this should help the public to envision changes. He thinks there will be good small group conversations. Staff anticipate 50-100 participants because of the subject matter, which will continue through the Council process this year.

7) **New Business**

Mr. Bohannon will meet with the Conservation Commission, which is focused on more public outreach and education on City-owned lands because of successful stewardship hikes at Goose Pond in 2018.

8) **Next Meeting**

Due to conflicts, the Board agreed to change the next meeting date to **Tuesday, June 18, 2019 at 8:00 am.**

9) **Adjournment**

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

Respectfully submitted by,
Katryna Kibler, Minute Taker
Respectfully edits by, Andy Bohannon