

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, March 10, 2020

8:00 AM

**Recreation Center,
Room 14**

Members Present:

Arthur Winsor, Chair
Councilor Steve Hooper, Vice Chair
George Foskett
Judy Sadoski
Suzy Krautmann
Dave Whaley
Thomas Haynes, Alternate

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Director of Parks,
Recreation & Facilities

Members Not Present:

Paul Bocko

1) Welcome & Call to Order

Chair Winsor called the meeting to order at 8:02 AM.

2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – February 11, 2020

Mr. Foskett moved to approve the minutes of February 11, 2020, which Mr. Whaley seconded and the Board carried unanimously.

3) Finance Report

a. Budget Updates

Mr. Bohannon recalled that the budget, as presented on the last page of the meeting packet, was accepted by the Trustees. Initially, \$6,000 was allotted for the landscape contract, which has been amended to \$5,000 because the company agreed to continue at that cost.

The Conway School contract is signed and the City Manager awaited the fully executed copy back from them. This Board had budgeted \$12,000 for the project but the final price was \$10,500 all-inclusive.

Mr. Bohannon received a quote from Bartlett Tree for work this year, which was higher than in the past, and so conversations will continue about reducing the price to \$5,000 so the work does not have to go to bid.

Mr. Foskett noted that the issue of having to go to bid for project costs over \$5,000 keeps arising. He asked if it is time for Council to consider raising that threshold because it seems to slow things down. Mr. Bohannon agreed that it would be up to Council to alter that fiscal policy, which exists as a part of City Ordinance. Mr. Bohannon thinks it is a good fiscal practice and does not think the policy slows things down, but rather keeps the City honest. Mr. Bohannon explained that any projects over \$25,000 require a signed agreement with the City Manager. Ms. Sadoski added that Council and staff review those policies annually. She added that these policies are more so best practices in industry.

4) Friends of the Arboretum at Ashuelot River Park Report

Mr. Foskett reported that the Friends intended to hold their April meeting at the park. The Friends are also pleased the Conway School project is progressing and they want to be as involved as possible.

Mr. Foskett initiated continued discussion of requesting a higher donation from Art in the Park to counter wear and tear of the event on the arboretum. He said that the event benefits the City but it can come with detriment to the park. Mr. Whaley asked what the City's cost is to return the park to standard after the event and Mr. Bohannon said it is weather dependent. If it is good weather, the subsequent maintenance is a matter of aerating and over seeding to counter compaction from the event. If the weather is rainy, he said a lot of subsequent maintenance is required, often doubling or tripling the aerating work. Mr. Whaley asked the current charge for Art in the Park. Mr. Bohannon said that artists are charged for their place through the organizer, Monadnock Arts Council, but the organizer is never charged by the City to use the park. However, in the past, the Monadnock Arts Council has donated \$100 to the Friends. Mr. Whaley asked approximately how much the Parks & Recreation Department spends after each event. Mr. Bohannon can bring those specific costs to the Board, which would include mowing and trimming before each event, overtime fees for weekend trash collection, and aeration time and equipment.

Ms. Sadoski recalled the Board having this discussion many times. She clarified that the Board does not charge a fee for any event in the park but might ask for a donation. She said that charging a fee would be a complicated policy change to determine who is charged for what and who makes those decisions. For example, some events have been denied in the past because they did not meet the nature of the park. She said that Art in the Park has resisted increasing their donation. Mr. Whaley thought the event has approximately 100 artists and he could not imagine increasing the donation would be a significant inconvenience. Ms. Sadoski said that because it is a public park, people think it should be freely usable by non-profits. She said this discussion and attempting to charge fees could lead to other ramifications.

Councilor Hooper agreed with Ms. Sadoski about the politics of this issue. He thought that in general, it is anticipated that fees will increase incrementally over time. He thought any non-profit would understand that the cost of doing business has increased in all sectors. He did not see a logical way that anyone would oppose significantly a modest increase to \$125 or \$150, for example. Ms. Sadoski recalled that it is a requested donation, not a fee. Councilor Hooper said the Board/Friends could request a \$150 donation. Chair Winsor asked if anyone has ever been charged a fee for using the park. Mr. Bohannon said no, events are not really allowed besides Art in the Park, which was essentially grandfathered in. He said it is complicated when he receives requests to use the park, because it is a public space. Many things like yoga classes in the park cannot be denied, though Mr. Foskett added that some groups are asked to donate to the park as a part of their yoga class fee. Mr. Bohannon said that he receives many requests for weddings in the park as well, which are allowed for a maximum 25 people, without tents or chairs; requesters are informed it is a public park and other things could be happening at the same time.

Mr. Whaley said there seems to be an inordinate cost due to Art in the Park, which is an event where people are generating income, and he did not think increasing a donation would amount to much per artist. He thinks it is reasonable to assess the costs of this event for the City as a baseline to inform any changes to the donation request. Mr. Bohannon will provide those figures at the next meeting. Mr. Foskett said that the Board must also ensure no damage to the new irrigation system because of the event. Mr. Bohannon said there was no damage to the system from the last event, but their communication with the City needs to be better this year.

Mr. Foskett said the Monadnock Arts Council pays the \$100 donation. Individual artists at Art in the Park pay \$100 for their tent/selling space. The Monadnock Arts Council does not take a commission of the artists' sales at the event. Ms. Sadoski recalled that the Monadnock Arts Council is a non-profit, which also contributes to the community. Therefore, there should be a delicate balance between the Friends—a non-profit—requesting donations from another community non-profit, which is putting funds from this event back into the community. Mr. Bohannon said a compromise could be the City providing the Monadnock Arts Council free parking on Saturday mornings for the Art Walk. Chair Winsor said that Art in the Park is a good event that brings people to the park and said that it could be worth incurring some costs for good use of the park. He said that while it is good to be reimbursed for staff work, the Board does not want to lose this event either. Ms. Sadoski suggested assigning the Monadnock Arts Council a plot in the park to maintain.

Mr. Whaley asked if the City costs incurred for this event are already integrated into Mr. Bohannon's annual operating budget. Mr. Bohannon said yes, essentially. For three or four years, there was significant damage, including a drought year. Because the event is Labor Day weekend, there is sufficient time after to over seed for the next year. Regarding fees, Councilor Hooper said the City does not want to burden people unnecessarily, including artists at the event, but also the taxpayers who pay for the subsequent maintenance. He said there is no true win.

Concluding the Friends' report, Mr. Foskett said that a Friends member is starting the Master Gardener program in Peterborough. There will be a workday to split the hostas by the handicapped parking. The Roteract club is beginning work on their plot again. Mr. Bohannon will send Mr. Foskett another map of the sprinkler system. Chair Winsor will inquire if someone from the Geography Department at Keene State can work on a GIS map of the cobbles.

5) Park Discussion

a. Conway School Timeline

The contract for this project is complete and the City should receive a bill for the first 50% of the fee required up-front. The students will begin working in the park in April/May and Mr. Bohannon is waiting to find out whom the two/three students will be. He suggested a joint April afternoon meeting of this Board, the Friends, and the students at the Recreation Center. Establishing details of such a meeting awaits more information from the school. All members agreed with the plan for a joint meeting. Mr. Bohannon will keep everyone informed of details.

b. Bat Houses

Councilor Hooper asked the Board to discuss a date for a modest bat houses ribbon-cutting event. He questioned if it was too short notice for an April event in terms of publicity. He recalled that Mr. Bocko was interested in helping to plan.

The Board agreed to plan a bat house ribbon-cutting event at the park at **10:00 AM on either Tuesday, April 21 or Thursday, April 23**, to be determined depending on Ingrid Evans' availability. The Board agreed on these dates for the following reasons:

- This is the week of school break so kids are available and there could be an opportunity to collaborate with the Cheshire Children's Museum.
- Antioch students' semester ends on May 1.
- There have been successful past small park dedications with good participation on weekday mornings, such as the Church Street pocket park event with 30 attendees.
- April 22 is Earth Day.

The Board began discussing logistics of the event:

- Mr. Bohannon will advertise the details on Parks & Recreation social media several times, provide memos in the Councilor's mailboxes, and post a press release to all relevant media sources. He thinks that will generate a decent attendance.
- The event will include no more than 15 minutes of formal speaking, perhaps by Mr. Bohannon, Councilor Hooper, and/or Ms. Evans.
- After a brief formal introduction, attendees will receive perhaps a fact sheet and map to guide their finding the houses. There could also be a brief activity for kids who sat through the introduction.
- Members discussed inviting the Keene Swamp Bats mascot, Ribby, to engage the kids and perhaps lead a treasure hunt to the bat houses. Councilor Hooper can inquire.

Councilor Hooper will continue conversation with Mr. Bocko to confirm the date with Mr. Bohannon as soon as possible. The Board will receive a planning update at the April 14 meeting.

6) New Business

The QR code process is moving forward and Mr. Bohannon will follow-up with Bartlett Tree on the contract and whether they were able to lower the price by bundling the park (and library), Keene State, and Proctor Academy. As such, the price could be as low as \$285.

7) Adjournment – Next Meeting is Tuesday, April 14, 2020

The time and location of the April meeting might change to facilitate a joint meeting with the Friends and Conway School students.

There being no further business, Chair Winsor adjourned the meeting at 8:43 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katriona Kibler, Minute Taker
March 17, 2020

Respectfully edited by,
Andy Bohannon, Staff Liaison
June 8, 2020