

**City of Keene**  
**New Hampshire**

**CONSERVATION COMMISSION**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Monday, November 16, 2020**

**4:00 PM**

**Remote Meeting via Zoom**

**Members Present:**

Eloise Clark, Vice Chair  
Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Chair  
Kenneth Bergman  
Art Walker  
Andrew Madison  
Thomas P. Haynes, Alternate  
Steven Bill, Alternate  
Councilor Robert Williams

**Staff Present:**

Rhett Lamb, Assistant City  
Manager/Community Development Director  
Corinne Marcou, Administrative Assistant  
Andrew Bohannon, Parks, Recreation, and  
Facilities Director

**Members Not Present:**

Brian Reilly  
John Therriault

**1) Call to Order**

Chair Von Plinsky read a prepared statement explaining how the Emergency Order #12, pursuant to Executive Order #2020-04 issued by the Governor of New Hampshire, waives certain provisions of RSA 91-A (which regulates the operation of public body meetings) during the declared COVID-19 State of Emergency. He called the meeting to order at 4:34 PM. Roll call was conducted. Chair Von Plinsky asked if anyone has heard from John Therriault. Mr. Lamb and Ms. Marcou replied no.

**2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – September 21, 2020**

Mr. Walker made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of September 21, 2020. Mr. Bergman seconded the motion.

Mr. Bergman stated that he has a correction for page 4, line 151- it says something about him referencing the Airport Director saying they might be able to put a fence outside the object-free zone. What he was saying is that the Airport Director said they might be able to put a shorter fence *within* the object-free zone. He continued that he thinks that is no longer true, but that is what he said at the time. Mr. Lamb stated that he wrote that edit down.

Chair Von Plinsky asked if anyone else had corrections for the minutes. Hearing none, he called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously.

**3) Communications and Notifications**

None.

**4) Informational**

**a. Subcommittee Reports**

**i. Outreach Subcommittee**

Ms. Clark stated that she and Ms. Marcou have been working on posts for the various media outlets that the Conservation Commission can use within the City. She continued that she has sent Ms. Marcou 6 or 8 posts to use. Mr. Lamb replied that those are appearing on the Community Development Department's Facebook page. He continued that he looked tonight and it looks really nice. The photos are great, and the text is wonderful. Ms. Marcou has broken them into digestible pieces for the social media world. They really appreciate Ms. Clark and her contributions. Chair Von Plinsky agreed.

**ii. ARM Fund Subcommittee**

Chair Von Plinsky stated that there is nothing to report because the subcommittee has not met. He continued that they hope to start meeting regularly again after the holidays.

**5) Discussion Items**

**a. Continued Discussion – Invasive Species Management**

Chair Von Plinsky stated that he really enjoyed the fun and informative walk the Committee went on last month. He thanked Ms. Clark. He continued that it is fun walking on different parts of the rail trail but depressing to see all the invasive species out there. He asked for discussion on the topic.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he was looking at the Facebook page – he will cross post the Conservation Commission's content on the Parks, Recreation, and Facilities Department's page. He continued that the Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board has listed, in the new master plan, initiatives to get aggressive on the invasive species. He continued that their plan was to do several follow up programs/workshops in the spring with potentially Steve Robarge from the County, and Ms. Clark. The spring would provide more time to plan and organize which would be beneficial. It was a little rushed this past go-round but it worked out in the end. He believes this work is really important, not only for the Ashuelot River Park but also Ladies Wildwood Park. Mr. Bohannon stated that he follows another community on their social media site that is doing what the Conservation Commission is looking for. He will find that information for the Committee and share with them. Chair Von Plinsky thanked him.

Ms. Clark stated that there is quite a bit of water chestnut in the stream right before it gets to the wetlands at the airport. Chair Von Plinsky asked what time of year would be best to identify those budding species. He asked if it would be best in the March, or April months. Ms. Clark asked for clarity on identifiers for these species with Chair Von Plinsky replying yes just in case if the Committee would want to concentrate work in this area. Ms. Clark replied that April would be better.

Councilor Williams thanked Ms. Clark for last month's outdoor meeting. He continued by sharing a thought with respect to when in the spring to get active around invasive species management again; he suggests addressing garlic mustard, which pops up early and is easy to remove. This could be used as a good public education opportunity. Councilor Williams mentioned the "The Garlic Mustard Challenge," which provides materials the Commission can use to promote to the public. Garlic mustard is the easiest invasive species people can go after, with simply pulling it up and it's gone. This species doesn't continuously grow back as others which can be a struggle.

He continued that when he conceives of what invasive species projects to use to educate the general public in Keene, he sees different tiers with garlic mustard on the low tier as it is easy for untrained people to identify, pull and can be left on the side the road. There are smaller stands of knotweed also in that category. At the other end there are very big projects that would take significant amounts of funding, possibly pesticides, and large scale planning which the Commission should consider though they would need to figure out funding and political support. Their best bet would be to make sure that invasive species projects are integrated into other, broader projects. For example, if they are redoing Russell Park; that is a good time to set aside some budget and take care of the knotweed problem there.

Councilor Williams continued that then there is a big middle tier. One example is the buckthorn growing in the cemetery. One spot of buckthorn he would love to get rid of is in the middle of the cemetery and if they removed it they would probably want to put a shrub in. Councilor Williams questioned what the process would be to see a project like that to completion. Ideally someone from the City would look at projects such as this and would affirm the project. Or alternatively, they would say they know buckthorn is a problem in this specified area and lay out a plan for its removal and planting of other non-invasive plants. That kind of thing would require another level of process and planning. His goal is to have, to the extent possible, the City grease the skids and make that easy to do, or if something like that is happening, to get people to participate.

He continued that one more thing to mention is the public education aspect. He wants to put out the possibility of including the Library in some of this. Possibly they could have equipment to be borrowed from the library, and they are great at distributing literature and promoting programs and that sort of thing.

Andy Bohannon stated that Councilor Williams triggered some thoughts for him. He continued that Staff tries to make things more efficient, instead of trying to create barriers to folks wanting to do things with the City. In thinking about that, if the Commission wanted to target the any of the cemeteries and if they are aware of any potential cost, Mr. Bohannon could probably present the idea to the Trustees of Trust Funds. This avenue could provide the Commission with potentially \$4,500-\$5,000. He continued stating projects such as this maybe an Eagle Scout project or a general project for a neighborhood association to jump on board with. As projects such as these, it is part of ongoing upkeep and maintenance of the cemeteries and providing these projects for public participation may provide the Commission with funding from the Trustees. Councilor Williams replied that that sounds good. Chair Von Plinsky agreed.

Mr. Bergman thanked Councilor Williams and Ms. Clark for their leadership in this initiative. He continued that one thing that occurs to him is if they develop a vigilante force for getting rid of invasive species like this, they want to make sure it is in appropriate places. They are talking about targeting cemeteries, which is good. They want to be clear to not impinge on property rights in a way that would alienate people and make them opposed to the Commission's efforts. Also, it would be nice to have pamphlets about some of these invasive species, so if they see these invasive on private property, they can give to property owners to raise their awareness. Mr. Bergman continued that a few days after Ms. Clark's demonstrations on the rail bed, he noticed on the other side of the bridge, there was clearing done on the State right-of-way north of the rail bed. There are some ditches there and a lot of the landscape behind the fringe along the bank that Ms. Clark was pointing out has been cleared away in the lowland areas to the north up to West St. It would be interesting to see if the State did this and to see if invasive species move into this newly-cleared land that was mowed down to a stubble. He does not know who did that or why or when it happened, but it was a day or two after the Commission was there so it is interesting timing and maybe more than a coincidence.

Chair Von Plinsky stated that he likes the idea of focusing on an area, like a cemetery or somewhere they are sure is not private property. He continued that it is a good place to begin and gain community involvement. He also stated he would like to look at The Garlic Mustard Challenge, which sounds oddly fun.

Mr. Bill asked if maybe the Library could have a set of reference materials, the actual physical specimens that people could come in and look at to see if that is what they have on their property. He continued that his other thought is to get local teachers and students involved. The high school has an ecology club who may be looking for projects. Chair Von Plinsky replied yes, and that would lend itself to being in an enclosed area to start with. Mr. Bill replied yes, even at the high school there are possibilities.

Ms. Clark stated that there are lots of terrific ideas. She continued that it would not be too hard to make mounts of these invasive species and have them in placards that people can view at the Library. Secondly, she knows a very reputable firm that handles invasive species and if Mr.

Bohannon or anyone else who is interested wants to take a walk with them at some point they could get ballpark figures about what it would take to clear the invasive species professionally.

Mr. Bohannon replied stating his interest. He continued that he reached out to a couple in early October and was not able to obtain that type of pricing information. He got the pricing for the goats but that is a different program. If Ms. Clark could share that information or help coordinate, that would be appreciated.

Mr. Lamb stated that Mr. Bohannon said in the chat box that flyers or pamphlets are available from the UNH Cooperative Extension.

Mr. Walker asked if they should have a subcommittee working on this with assigned tasks. He continued that it would mean that instead of just beginning in April, they could actually put their feet on the ground in April. They could be working on pamphlets and so forth now and throughout the winter.

Chair Von Plinsky replied yes, it is good idea, although they need to be careful to not spread themselves too thin. He asked if anyone had anything else on this topic. Hearing none, he stated that they will keep this on the agenda for next month. He asked Ms. Clark to help Mr. Bohannon with the cost estimate folks, and for Councilor Williams to look more into the Garlic Mustard Challenge and see when that it and see if that is something the Commission can set up, so they can hit the ground running in the spring. He continued that like Mr. Walker said, they do not want to be talking about this in April; they want to be *doing* something in April.

**b. Continued Discussion – Airport CIP Wildlife Fence Project – Birding/Habitat viewing along Airport Rd.**

Mr. Bergan stated that he distributed a copy of a report he wrote in revised form in October; he thought he shared it with the group but maybe did not. It included some maps and a Flickr site where he posted maps and photos. He continued that he went on a tour of the grounds surrounding the runways with the Airport Director David Hickling last month. He displayed an aerial photo and explained the locations marked on it, stating that “A” is area nearest to the C&S hangar and near the letter “B” is a long ditch. They drove over around the ditch to the grassy area and up towards “C” which is the end of the runway that faces Airport Rd. to the northwest. That is the shorter runway which is used several times a month. There is that great loop on Airport Rd. where the marshland and wetland area is of prime interest to many viewers. He explained the location of a 35-foot wide grassy strip and a nearby three-foot-high berm that descends to a lower level where they thought that because it was lower than the grass at the runway it might be possible to put a lower fence, without impinging on the wetlands.

Mr. Bergman continued that what gives him pause, based on conversations with Mr. Hickling, is Mr. Hickling had an engineering firm that specializes in airport engineering and design and is familiar with FAA requirements, draw an alternative fence route. The closest to the end of the

runway that they would be allowed to put a fence in is shown in a red line on the map, and it clearly enters wetlands. The blue line shows the original alternative two fencing proposal that would extend from the C&S hangar across the wetlands to Airport Rd. and then all the way down to the water treatment plant. This would follow that route initially and already it is impinging on wetlands. As it bears to the left, it would have to enter the wetlands there, at some distance from Airport Rd. but nevertheless still running through wetlands. It would then extend to the lower left and be various distances from the runway and toward the intersection of two runways and to the left of that they knew it was an area that would be trouble. The turquoise lines delineate wetlands, and the red line, necessarily, even at the closest distance that it is permissible from the runway, will have to intercept the wetlands in several places as it runs southward/left. The red line continues on the west side of the runway from right to left, passing at intervals through wetlands, and would eventually make its way over to the left. It would run along the current fence along that side of the water treatment facility and then back down toward the runway. Somewhere in that vicinity there is a channel or culvert that carries water from Wilson Pond under that end of the runway. Then it goes into the woodlands there somewhere. It must follow a channel, but he has walked in that area and has not been able to find it.

Mr. Bergman continued that the sobering news is that along both runways, using that alternate route shown in the red line, there would be passage across wetlands. Probably the main impact to the wetlands would be in construction and installation of the fence. It is possible that once it is in, it would have minimal impact, but it would intercept movement of floating debris and of otters and beavers, for example. They may not have any attempt to move across where that red line is – typically otters are seen more to the right of that blue line, between the main marsh and the uplands. There is a stream that flows maybe where Ms. Clark was saying the water chestnut is, under Airport Rd. from the Edgewood neighborhood toward the marsh. Otters do pass along that sometimes and muskrats are in the marsh. Beavers usually stick by the creek to the south. So, there will be wetlands impacts.

He continued that Mr. Hickling pointed out that they will have to do another environmental impact study with an assessment of wetlands, because with this map the wetlands delineation is based on the 2017 (or earlier) Airport Master Plan. The wetlands may be more or less extensive than shown; it is unclear. There is a lot up in the air. What is clear is that minimally, at the upper/northwest end of the alternative short runway, that fencing would go across wetlands. The blue line also crosses wetlands before it gets to Airport Rd. There is no perfect solution. They are trying to protect the runway from wildlife incursions (mostly deer), in a way that is acceptable to and allowable by the FAA, and they want to minimize wildlife impacts. Mr. Hickling will have to come up with a plan that is acceptable to the NH Department of Environmental Services (NHDES), this Conservation Commission, and perhaps the Town of Swanzey's Conservation Commission. They would also like to preserve public viewing access as much as possible, because it is heavily used by photographers, birders, and others, from Keene and Swanzey and other towns and even people out of state. Mr. Hickling is quite aware of that. The situation is perhaps not quite as simple as he (Mr. Bergman) came away thinking, after their

walk-through around the airport, and that is primarily because of what they see at the northwest end of the shorter runway near the big loop of Airport Rd. and the marsh.

Mr. Bergman continued that Mr. Hickling said he is looking to have a Zoom conference with a variety of parties, such as NHDES, and NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT), which is through whom they would make a grant request to the FAA to cover the fencing. Mr. Hickling is concerned about the cost and wants it to be as inexpensive as possible. He thinks the FAA might be able to make some allowances to minimize wetland impacts, but inevitably there are going to be some impacts. Hopefully those would be primarily during construction, which could be staged during the colder months of the year. He wonders if it would be possible to use a wider mesh fence at the part where it runs through wetlands so that fish, floating vegetation or debris, and maybe even minks or otters could slip through. There are a lot of questions. He just got this map today from the Airport Director, who just had it finished a couple days prior by the engineers.

Mr. Lamb stated that he has talked with Mr. Hickling as well. He continued that Mr. Hickling is really open to options, and sees a fence that is closer to the runway as an important advantage, as opposed to enclosing a large area of habitat and wetland, because that is where the critters live that might end up on the runway. From an airport safety standpoint, he likes the fence closer to the runway. Mr. Bergman stated that he heard that from Mr. Hickling, too. He continued that however, the engineers gave Mr. Hickling a wake-up call with what they said had to happen at the end of runway 14-34 up near the loop of Airport Rd. and the marshland.

Mr. Bill stated that the alternate red line route is quite circuitous. He asked what is determining its location and for clarification, asked that it was not just the distance from the runway. Mr. Bergman replied that the effort is to place it as far from the runway as possible on solid turf but not to impinge on wetlands. Mr. Bill asked, that the fence will still be going through wetlands. Mr. Bergman replied yes, apparently it has to, to satisfy the FAA. He continued that to the upper left/northeast, that is sticking to the turf, the area that is mowed. What is not clear to him from that map is where the blue line (the original alternative one) heads from the C&S hangar up toward Airport Rd., the tree line on the right is unclear. Some is pine tree upland and some is probably some kind of wet area. There are lots of wetlands on the other side of Airport Rd. as well, to the west. The engineers are trying to help come up with the cheapest, shortest fence route, but they also want it to be effective in eliminating wildlife incursions into the runway. There are sometimes foxes, coyotes, and bears but mostly deer. The hope is that at the upper end where it runs through the marsh, the big loop at Airport Rd., it might be possible for the FAA to allow a shorter fence because deer are unlikely to be crossing those wetlands and then jump. They go in the wet meadow area around the corner and have other ways of getting in. He continued that a lot of this information is probably going to come through in some kind of conference or negotiation between NHDOT, FAA, NHDES, and engineers. Mr. Hickling said he would like to have a Conservation Commission member, but he himself thinks it would be great if there were two members there, to hear all this and contribute. Mr. Bergman stated that he is not thoroughly grounded in wetlands regulations and what role the NHDES might play in this; he

can only look at the situation as a user. Someone like fellow Commission member, Andrew Madison might be a better person to have speak, although he is not sure if a Conservation Commission member would be allowed to participate at such a conference or to what extent. That conference might happen in the next couple months. Mr. Hickling wants construction to start in 2022 and spend next year doing the planning though they do not want to do planning until they know what is allowed and not allowed.

Chair Von Plinsky asked Mr. Lamb if he has heard a time table for this sort of conference. Mr. Lamb replied that if construction starts in FY 2022 that could actually, potentially be July 2021. He continued that in all likelihood that would be a fall start, not July, but Mr. Hickling needs to start the design process in the next couple months. He does not have a date for this conference but he is aware that Mr. Hickling was trying to put that together. He will follow up with Mr. Hickling and find out, and let him know that the Conservation Commission would like two members on that call. Chair Von Plinsky replied that that would be great, because the Commission has a lot to bring to the table. He continued that there are a few things that seem like low-hanging fruit. Following the tree line is great, but if you are enticing deer into an open field that is inside the fence, why not put that outside of the fence if it is not going to hurt anything else? Having Commission members at the table would be great. They can sort through exactly who that is once they know when the conference will be.

Mr. Bergman stated that for most airports near wetlands, geese are an issue. He continued that there are several pairs of geese that breed at the Airport, but so far geese and ducks have not proven to be a major problem for pilots there, and Mr. Hickling is not quite sure why, but he is grateful for that. It is mostly deer. They go out with those “flash bang” things almost every day to scare them away.

Chair Von Plinsky thanked Mr. Bergman for all of his work with this. He continued that they look forward to hearing from Mr. Lamb about a date for the conference and then they will determine who from the Commission will join that.

### **c. Continued Discussion – Greater Goose Pond Forest Management Plan**

Chair Von Plinsky asked Mr. Bohannon if he has anything on this. Mr. Bohannon stated that he reached out to Swift Corwin, who was part of the document writers/consultants of the Plan. The two of them took a walk through a different property that Mr. Bohannon needed some work done. They talked about Goose Pond and the best effective method. He continued that Mr. Corwin did not want to give him any type of scope of work needed, because Mr. Corwin wants to be able to bid on the project. Mr. Corwin recommended a conversation with Steve Robarge though Mr. Bohannon stated and Mr. Robarge have been playing phone tag for a couple weeks. His plan is to work with Mr. Robarge, create an RFQ, and go out for qualifications, with the management practices to be complete in the next spring/summer. The one concern Mr. Bohannon stated is that whomever receives the contract will be getting paid from the logging



process. Mr. Bohannon also stated that he will have more information for the Commission at their next meeting and that the project is beginning.

Ms. Clark stated that she is active on the UNH Cooperative Extension Advisory Council, and Mr. Robarge has moved up from County Forester to the State's Coordinator of Foresters. The County is hoping to hire a new Forester and starting the process by the first of January. Ms. Clark stated that might be part of why it is so hard to get a hold of Mr. Robarge. Mr. Bohannon replied that it is a coordination of two different schedules though Mr. Robarge has returned all of his phone calls.

Chair Von Plinsky stated that the Commission will discuss this further next month with the hope that Mr. Bohannon can connect with Mr. Robarge. Mr. Bohannon stated that he would like to start the outline for the Chair and the Commission to review, and approve to be provide the RFQ for the early winter when a lot of companies would be looking to bid on it. He definitely wants to talk with Mr. Robarge as there may be a better time of year to push an initiative like this forward. He continued that he has a little bit to learn about this process. It will be his first time doing an RFQ of this nature, so he wants to work closely with Mr. Robarge on this process.

Mr. Bill asked if there is an estimate for the amount of acreage of logging that would be done to support this. Mr. Bohannon replied that there were definitely outlined portions of Goose Pond that were highlighted to be cut. He continued that he does not have the number of acres off the top of his head, but it was three or four lots. It could create a better sustainable forest initiative, which Mr. Corwin and Jeff highly recommended. Mr. Lamb stated that there is pretty extensive information on all of the areas proposed for active management. Mr. Bohannon stated that they put up the links on the Community Development Department web page, the Conservation Commission web page, and the Parks, Recreation, and Facilities Department web page. So there is visibility for the project in multiple locations.

Mr. Lamb stated that at a future meeting it would be good to talk about the Commission and its involvement. One key recommendation that came out of that report was to set up a stewardship committee. He continued that in the last discussion they talked about the Commission wanting a role, either through the stewardship committee or separately, to talk about each one of these proposed cuts as it was going to be proposed and come forward for a contract of some kind. It would be important to talk about the Commission's role with the stewardship committee and how to get that process started to create that group. Chair Von Plinsky replied yes, it would be good to talk about that. He asked who is responsible for setting up that stewardship committee. Mr. Lamb replied that the City Council has the authority to create that committee. He continued that the work to create the management plan itself was started with the Conservation Commission. He suggests that the Conservation Commission is the group that would push this along, in addition to City Staff. Probably the Commission should discuss this and make a recommendation to the City Council about a stewardship committee. Chair Von Plinsky replied that this should be on next month's agenda. If the ball is in their court, they have the power to get the right people on a committee like that. He asked everyone to think about it and maybe

have ideas next time for not the names of individual people to ask to join it, but for the skillsets of people they should ask to be a part of it. Mr. Lamb asked that they also think about what they think the role of the Commission should be with respect to the future of Goose Pond.

**6) New or Other Business**

Mr. Bergman stated that Mr. Lamb showed them, in passing, a map of the tax ditches. He asked if they could look at that map more closely. Mr. Lamb replied yes, he will send that as a digital file.

Ms. Clark asked if anyone else attended the NH Association of Conservation Commission meetings. She continued that she went and there were good sessions on the wetland regulations the state has formally adopted, and turtle conservation in NH. She has some links if anyone is interested.

**7) Adjournment – Next Meeting Date Monday, December 21, 2020**

There being no further business, Chair Von Plinsky adjourned the meeting at 5:29 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Staff edits submitted by,  
Corinne Marcou