

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

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

**Monday, December 21, 2020**

**4:30 PM**

**Remote Meeting via Zoom**

**Members Present:**

Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Chair  
Eloise Clark, Vice Chair  
Councilor Robert Williams  
Art Walker  
Ken Bergman  
Steven Bill  
Brian Reilly  
Andrew Madison  
John Therriault, Alternate  
Tom Haynes, Alternate

**Staff Present:**

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

**Members Not Present:**

**1) Call to Order**

Chair Von Plinsky called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM and read the Executive Order authorizing a remote meeting: Emergency Order #12, issued by the Governor of the State of New Hampshire pursuant to Executive Order #2020-04. Pursuant to this order, members present stated their locations and whether calling alone.

**2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – November 16, 2020**

Mr. Madison moved to approve the minutes of November 16, 2020, which Mr. Walker seconded, and the motion passed with a unanimous roll call vote in favor.

**3) Communication and Notifications**

**a. NH DES Letter – November 25, 2020**

Mr. Lamb cited this letter in the meeting packet that is a standard request for information from the NH Department of Environmental Services (DES) for a Wetlands Permit application for Ash Brook Court in Keene. He said DES was asking the applicant to change from the expedited minimum impact application to a standard dredge and fill minor project application, citing rules

on wetlands impacts being within 10' of an adjacent property. This was simply a notification to the Commission that DES requested this information.

**4) Informational**

**a. Subcommittee Reports**

**i. *Outreach Subcommittee***

Vice Chair Clark continues sending environmental education posts to Ms. Marcou on a regular basis, who posts them to the City website and Community Development Department Facebook. The Chairman shares the Facebook posts with his network and encourages others to as well.

**ii. *ARM Fund Subcommittee***

The Chairman hoped to meet with Mr. Bergman and anyone else interested after the holidays.

**5) Discussion Items**

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

The Chairman reported researching the Garlic Mustard Challenge, which he thought could be an event at the cemetery given how easy it is to identify and pick without being expensive or time consuming. The ideal time is early May, climate change notwithstanding. Mr. Bohannon would have more information to report in January. Councilor Williams agreed that the Garlic Mustard Challenge was a good possibility and envisioned Commissioners identifying City land with garlic mustard in advance to on social media with a map and how to participate.

Councilor Williams continued explaining that he toured Woodland cemetery recently with a landscape architect and discussed various issues including buckthorn and knotweed. They realized how pervasive a problem knotweed is in the cemetery and therefore there are other projects meriting attention first that are less expensive; he said the knotweed there could be insurmountable. At the cemetery, Councilor Williams suggested that it was feasible to address buckthorn with volunteers if the Parks Department marks areas in advance. The Councilor continued discussing the Russell Park (former Carpenter Field) project and cited the expansive knotweed problem on both banks of Black Brook, where he said exciting work was happening on the City-owned side to enhance flood storage. If the property owners on the opposite bank were amenable, he asked what would be required to remove the invasives at that scale, assuming a substantial budget, pesticide application, and long-term volunteer maintenance.

Councilor Williams referenced an email from Vice Chair Clark on an invasive species training that he attended previously and recommended. In particular, he thought it would be a valuable training for City Staff as well, and suggested that the Commission's budget could fund the \$35 registration fee for interested practitioners working in land management. The Chairman supported the idea of the Commission doing what is possible to ensure people take the class, adding that the walking tour with Vice Chair Clark was illuminating.

Mr. Madison said he had been paying attention to the plans for Russell Park because he has worked along that portion of Beaver Brook and agreed that the knotweed is pervasive on both sides and he hoped it would be addressed in any future plan for the park – not just removal, but long-term maintenance as well. He said that plan must include replacing the knotweed with native vegetation to stabilize the steep streambanks. Mr. Lamb said both alternatives being considered included interesting streambank modifications that would likely mitigate those steep slopes and promote a more natural future stream. While Mr. Lamb was unsure how the plans addressed specifically long-term invasive species management, he said such care is a standard component of City contracts that involve invasives.

Mr. Bergman recalled the pervasive knotweed problem at Ladies Wildwood Park that he thought might be more accessible for management; he cited local community support for that park as well. Mr. Bohannon toured Ladies Wildwood Park recently with a forester and invasives were a high in that conversation.

Mr. Bohannon continued referring those interested to [www.keeneparks.com](http://www.keeneparks.com), where there are links to the design alternatives, information on repurposing the greenspace, and a 30-minute video of the landscape designer narrating the two designs for Russell Park. He appreciated Councilor Williams initiating discussion of this project. In response to Mr. Madison, Mr. Bohannon said that all vegetation on the east streambank would be replaced with native vegetation and discussions were ongoing with the west bank landowners because as others indicated, eradication on one bank is fruitless if not performed on the other. He was happy to present details on the plans for Russell Park at a future meeting. Barring significant permitting delays, Mr. Bohannon said the goal is to start the project in August/September 2021.

The Chairman asked whether the western streambank owner would have to pay for removal or was a partnership possible. Mr. Bohannon said he was hopeful to find a grant to facilitate. Mr. Lamb said the City funded dredging the section of Beaver Brook in question in 2014 with an objective to return the stream profile for flood mitigation. There are three or four owners on that bank with whom to negotiate.

Vice Chair Clark said knotweed removal at this location could be a potential Aquatic Resource Mitigation (ARM) Fund project, especially if returning function and value to the Brook, and Mr. Lamb agreed. Vice Chair Clark would familiarize herself with the plans for Russell Park to support a meeting of the ARM Fund Subcommittee on the topic. Mr. Bohannon thought extra funding might be available to fund consultant assistance with the ARM Fund application.

The Chairman questioned if the western streambank owners would be interested in selling those banks to the City for incorporation into the park. Mr. Lamb thought it was a creative idea but not possible within the park schedule.

On the subject of garlic mustard, Mr. Madison said that before Covid-19, the head chef at Machina Arts Restaurant held a dinner featuring knotweed and might consider creating some recipes with garlic mustard to help draw attention to the issue.

Mr. Bohannon described an upcoming program at the Ashuelot River Park resulting from its master plan. A large group of 30-50 kids would be volunteering in the park over the course of one week in April as a part of the Interact program through the local Rotary Clubs. This is in lieu of their annual volunteer trip to El Salvador. Covid-19 precautions would be followed strictly. Part of that project could be invasive species removal. Mr. Bohannon would try to incorporate Conservation Commission priorities as much as possible.

#### **b. Continued Discussion – Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Plan**

Mr. Lamb led discussion based on feedback and the last meeting indicating that the stewardship plan needs championing. He said that the thorough plan was adopted in 2018 as the result of ad hoc committee work that did not shy from managing conflicting challenges in a park of this magnitude. The plan is too large to transmit electronically but can be found on the City website and he encouraged members to review the plan before the next meeting. A primary recommendation of the plan was to establish a stewardship committee. Additionally, the plan had stewardship recommendations for community outreach and education (e.g., self-guided tours and natural/cultural history walks), wildlife habitat and forest stewardship (e.g., timber harvesting to fund future park improvements), and recreational trails stewardship (e.g., signage, trail blazing, and improved access). He said there was much more in the plan beyond timber management that deserves focus and so a forest stewardship committee could be established with those foci in mind. He agreed with the Chairman that part of developing this committee would be to determine whether it reports to the Conservation Commission or to City Council directly. The Chairman thought it best for the Commission to have input in establishing the committee but for it to report ultimately to City Council. He fears the Commission being spread too thin.

Mr. Haynes recalled that an Outreach Subcommittee had begun a series of seasonal educational walks in Goose Pond Forest that were interrupted by Covid-19. He encouraged moving forward calling it a stewardship plan as intended versus a management plan. Mr. Haynes asked for Mr. Bohannon's opinion. Mr. Bohannon replied that establishing a stewardship committee was a good idea because all the components outlined in the plan can cumulatively educate the community on how to manage a forest properly and he did not want the plan to collect dust. He cited some tasks outlined in the plan that were accomplished already including a new trailhead, parking lot, and kiosk as a byproduct of the dam project, a second kiosk at the end of the dike road, and early discussions with Peter Poanessa to develop trail signs. Mr. Bohannon is in favor of working with Mr. Lamb and anyone else to move the plan forward. A request for proposals process was underway with County Forester Steve Roberge for the timber management aspect.

Mr. Bill wondered if marking boundary lines should precede other tasks in the plan and Mr. Bohannon said that the cost of boundary surveying was too much to prioritize it first.

Whether the Commission serves as a conduit for the stewardship committee, Mr. Bergman said it would be valuable for the Commission to remain apprised of the committee's process and have opportunity to comment.

The Chairman recalled representation on the steering Committee that could guide composing the stewardship committee including one/two Conservation Commission members, Keene State College and Antioch University environmental studies students, representatives of the New England Mountain Bike Association, and a local faculty member, among others. There were recommendations to also include an abutter and a member of a local conservation organization like the Monadnock Conservancy, Harris Center, or Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests. Councilor Williams suggested fellow Councilor Kate Bosley as an abutter. Mr. Bill wondered if a Parks Department Staff person would be valuable on the stewardship committee and Mr. Lamb said that that the Staff liaison(s) to the committee would be available for advice and recommendation when the membership has questions. Mr. Lamb thought that depending on how the Commission asks Council to set-up the stewardship committee, it could be possible to include members that are not Keene residents, which might be the case for representatives of regional groups like the Harris Center. The Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board could serve as a "template" for this stewardship committee. Mr. Haynes suggested including a member of the Antioch Bird Club because timber harvesting benefits certain species. Mr. Haynes added that he was the Conservation Commission Chairman throughout developing the plan and wanted to be considered as a member for the stewardship committee; the Chairman and others indicated support. Mr. Lamb would review the steering committee's composition, which could also help guide the number of members to solicit; likely five to ten members.

Mr. Bergman suggested that an important role of the stewardship committee would be to keep the public apprised of future timber harvesting and the Chairman agreed that an important reason to establish the committee sooner is to keep the public aware of all activities in the park, not just those that might be perceived as negative.

Before the January meeting, the Chairman, Mr. Lamb, and Mr. Bohannon agreed to draft a charge for the stewardship committee. The Chairman asked everyone to review the plan in advance of that discussion.

### **c. Update – Bee City Designation**

The draft Resolution was included in the meeting packet. The Commission already recommended forwarding it to Council and so no further vote was needed. The language provided by the Xerces Society was modified to represent Keene and would be forwarded to the Society for review before a final draft is sent to City Council. Once adopted, Mr. Bohannon would inform the Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board to guide their actions as well.

### **6) New or Other Business**

**a. 2021 Calendar**

Mr. Bergman moved to adopt the 2021 meeting calendar as amended to read January *19* instead of *12*, which Mr. Bill seconded, and the motion passed with a unanimous roll call vote in favor.

Mr. Lamb agreed to share information on airport related meetings with Mr. Bergman. Mr. Lamb would also agendize an airport discussion for next month.

Commissioners thanked Mr. Reilly for his years of service as a regular member and for continuing to serve as an alternate member. One does not need to be a Commissioner to participate in these public meetings.

**7) Adjournment – Next Meeting Date: Tuesday, January 19, 2021**

There being no further business, Chair Von Plinsky adjourned the meeting at 5:48 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker  
December 23, 2020