

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, March 9, 2021

8:00 AM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

Arthur Winsor, Chair
Dave Whaley
Paul Bocko
Dian Mathews
Thomas Haynes, Alternative

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, PRF Director

Members Not Present:

Judy Sadoski
Suzy Krautmann

Andy Bohannon 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.

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Winsor called the meeting to order at 8:02 AM. Roll call was taken.

2) Acceptance of February 9, 2021 Minutes

Paul Bocko made a motion to accept the minutes of February 9, 2021 as presented. Dave Whaley seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Dian Mathews mentioned that according to Robert's Rules of Order they do not need to vote on approval of minutes. She expressed the need for the City of Keene to update their parliamentary procedure and acknowledged that it's typically a long and arduous process. Short discussion ensued resulting in Dian Mathews and Mr. Bohannon stating they will touch base with the City Clerk and look further into the topic.

3) Finance 2021 Budget

Andy Bohannon stated he still needs to reach out to two other contractors for pricing related to the landscape contract before they can create a budget, which will likely occur in April. He gave the advisory board the option to wait to approve the budget until then,

or move forward using the current budget outline and adding an extra \$500 to the landscape contract to be safe.

Mr. Bohannon added that he recently learned, from Leslie Casey, of a maintenance practice within the beds which would eliminate the need for a contractor to come in twice a year to clean the beds. He further explained that the practice calls for them to leave the fall debris in the beds to help the habitat, and then in the spring they would do a clean-up, make mulch, and repurpose it back into the beds. Mr. Bohannon stated that \$3,000 of the \$6,000 landscape contract budget is for the fall and spring clean-up, and \$3,000 is for the mulch. If they used the aforementioned maintenance practices they could save money by eliminated the fall clean-up. He stated his only concerns with that plan would be obtaining a contractor to do the work in the spring, and making sure to educate the public around the process of leaving fall debris in the beds as it pertains to appearance. Mr. Bohannon also added that if they are going to be adopting a Climate Resiliency Master Plan, this practice would be a great way of starting.

Leslie Casey stated that the practice demonstrates evolving thinking about how municipal public spaces and gardens are being maintained. She added that the practice could tie in nicely with Bee City USA initiative because she believes Xerces Society invented the idea of leaving fall debris in beds. They could potentially be a great help with publicizing and promoting the rationale behind the maintenance practice.

Dian Mathews stated she plans to start a publicity campaign with The Friends to inform the public that the park is going native and explain exactly what that entails. This maintenance practice could be included in that information. She also recommended placing small information signs in the park to help explain.

Chair Winsor asked if leaves on the grass will be left alone as well and Dian Mathews clarified that leaves would only be left in the beds. She stated that they would use a shredder to help the leaves degrade faster and decrease the chance of them blowing away, and mentioned that a landscaper would be needed for that part of the practice. Dian Mathews added that if the job was done well with leaf shredding in the fall, then they may not need to have a contractor go back in the spring. It would be a fairly quick job of raking and neatening up the beds which the advisory board could probably handle.

A discussion ensued about the timeline of clean-up if they applied this new practice. Mr. Bohannon asked if they would need to do any clean-up this spring since it was done in the fall. Dian Mathews stated that there wouldn't be much to clean up, aside from some branches, which could be a task for the April work outing. Mr. Bohannon clarified that if they start the practice in the fall they would eliminate the spring clean-up and instead do the mulching, and then do a fall clean-up that would include repurposing the mulch into the beds.

Paul Bocko suggested they wait to approve the budget until they have more information from the contractor regarding this practice and a different way of mulching. Chair Winsor

agreed stating they'd need to discuss with the landscaper what they would change with the new practice.

4) Park Discussion – Master Plan Implementation
a. April Work Outing

Mr. Bohannon recapped that they brought the donation of funds from the two Interact Clubs to the Finance Committee, which was accepted. They now have an agreement through the City Manager's office and a signed contract with Bensonwood for the design and construction of the pergola. They have also paid an initial deposit of \$5,000 to Bensonwood and the additional \$10,000 from the donations will be paid when the project is completed. Mr. Bohannon added that the gazebo has been removed and Bensonwood sent over the design plan for the pergola. They are in good shape as far as the physical side of things prior to the build but will now need to turn their focus to the administrative side of things. Mr. Bohannon acknowledged that he owes Louise Zerba and her team some information regarding volunteer registration paperwork that will need to be completed and stated he also needs to talk with Chair Winsor and Dian Mathews regarding project duties for the kids.

Chair Winsor thanked Mr. Bohannon and his crew for getting this project going. Mr. Bohannon noted that there has been positive feedback so far with regards to removal of the gazebo and the act of addressing an issue that has been a safety concern of the community and their ability to enjoy the park.

Mr. Bohannon stated he is basing the details of the outing on 30-40 kids per day and plans to have small work groups socially distanced throughout the park. Bensonwood will be using some of those kids to work on the pergola. The planned dates are Monday, April 26 through Wednesday, April 28, from 8:00am to 3:00pm.

Leslie Casey asked what will be happening in the beds because it's too early in the year for annuals. Mr. Bohannon stated they will mostly be doing clean-up and any plantings that would be appropriate at that time. Dian Mathews stated they should not plant until after Memorial Day and Mr. Bohannon suggested they could focus on preparing the beds instead.

Dian Mathews stated The Friends has Michael Nerrie, from Distant Hill Gardens, coming to do a walk around and help plan out where they are going to plant shrubs. She will work to schedule this walk around before the work outing to help inform activities for those days.

Chair Winsor asked if they planned to move any existing shrubs. Mr. Bohannon stated there needs to be some inventory done as far as removing trees and shrubs. He reached out to Bartlett Tree and will follow-up with them to explore if they will be doing some of that removal.

Louise Zerba encouraged them to figure out assignments ahead of time so the kids aren't standing around with nothing to do. Mr. Bohannon stated he will be prepared, February presented a lot of challenges and the project got put on hold, but he will be focusing on it in March.

Thomas Haynes stated he is available as a volunteer for all three of the work outing days.

b. Invasive Species

Chair Winsor suggested they could have the kids work on invasive species during the work outing. Dian Mathews stated invasive species likely won't be up in April, but they could incorporate that investigation into the walk with Michael Nerrie. She suggested that the advisory board have a planning meeting at the park in early April to walk around the park and make decisions on where to set the groups up and decide what the kids could be doing. Chair Winsor agreed with this idea. Mr. Bohannon stated he would also like to meet well before that park walk to further plan details. He offered Tuesday March 16, 2021 at 3:00 or 3:30pm for a virtual sub-group meeting. The advisory board agreed, and Mr. Bohannon stated he will send out the link and information to everyone.

Leslie Casey stated she's been doing some research and anything involving digging up or pulling up invasive species can actually make the problem worse. For smaller areas it's suggested to mow them 3 times a year for 3-5 years to eventually starve it out, or mow and apply Roundup for 3 years. Additionally, they have to be extremely careful about how they deal with the cuttings because a thumbnail size piece of any part of the plant can re-establish. Given that they are in the Connecticut River watershed, which is one of the most valuable on the planet, they don't want to add to the problem. Chair Winsor agreed and stated they do need to be careful and should talk about this in the sub-group meeting as well.

Paul Bocko stated Douglas Cygan, the Invasive Species Coordinator for the NH Department of Agriculture, is a great resource and may be helpful for the advisory board to connect with. His recommendation in the past has been cutting the invasive species and dousing them with chemicals.

Dian Mathews asked if Leslie's research mentioned anything about Roundup used near water, noting that it would require clearance and permitting with the state. Leslie Casey stated there wasn't much mentioned but the permitting will be an additional hurdle in the process.

c. Pollinator Gardens

Dian Mathews stated she hasn't walked around yet but her plan is to hopefully create one big pollinator garden with both shade loving and sun loving pollinator plants. She noted that they should start off small and that The Friends will be discussing this in their upcoming meeting.

Dian Mathews brought up one big issue with regards to water. She stated they'll have to carry jugs of water from the river to water the plantings, which is a significant amount of water and work. She mentioned a faucet with a hose would be extremely helpful. Mr. Bohannon stated now that the irrigation system in the park is updated to city water they can make that connection happen; however, they can't make a public spigot. He assured her that they can and will create that hose set up for the project. Dian Mathews added that it either needs to happen in spring or fall for plantings to be successful. Mr. Bohannon stated he will give Dian Mathews a map of the irrigation system for her planning.

d. Grants

Dian Mathews stated she hasn't connected with the gambling place yet but will be applying to 100+ Women and will keep applying to whatever else she can find. She will also be following up with two places suggested by the National Garden Club.

5) Report from Friends of Ashuelot River Park Arboretum

Dian Mathews re-stated that Michael Nerrie will be coming to do a walkthrough and anyone from the advisory board who wants to join is welcome.

The Friends are beginning to establish partners, the first of which is the Workforce Opportunity. This organization provides kids with workplace visits to help them identify their interests. Dian Mathews stated she has already been working with some of the kids to see if they enjoy gardening.

In an attempt to get more of the Workforce Opportunity kids involved they are planning a seed planting project. They will be preparing the pots with seeds and placing them in labeled paper bags so the kids can pick up their bags, bring them home, and follow the instructions. When the plants grow they will pick a "workforce spot" and plant everything. The idea is to get the kids into the park and help them make it their own. Dian Mathews stated this will be a fairly small area in the park so the groups will be fine using jugs to water the plants.

Dian Mathews mentioned that she found a map of project phases for the park, as well as a large book of Natural Resource Inventory. She requested the advisory board's help when she sorts through those resources to make sure they aren't doing something that's already been done.

6) New or Other Business

Chair Winsor reported that the Cheshire Career Center has a new horticulture teacher who seems to have great energy and ideas and he would like to get her involved with the park at some point.

There was no other new business.

7) Adjourn – Next Meeting Tuesday, April 13, 2021 at 8:00 AM

Chair Winsor adjourned the meeting at 9:02 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Nicole Cullinane, Minute Taker

Edits submitted by,
Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation & Facilities Director

Additional edits by,
Katie Kibler, Clerk's Office