

City of Keene
New Hampshire

MUNICIPAL SERVICES, FACILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, February 23, 2022

6:00 PM

Council Chambers,
City Hall

Members Present:

Mitchell H. Greenwald, Chair
Randy L. Filiault, Vice Chair
Robert C. Williams
Catherine I. Workman
Kris E. Roberts

Staff Present:

Elizabeth A. Dragon, City Manager
Thomas P. Mullins, City Attorney
Kürt Blomquist, Public Works Director
Duncan Watson, Assistant Public Works
Director

Members Not Present:

All Present

Chair Greenwald called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM and explained the procedures of the meeting.

1) **Loretta Simonds – Damage to a Sewer Line and House Foundation at 79 Woodburn Street and a Request to Remove a Nearby City Tree**

Chair Greenwald asked to hear from Loretta Simonds regarding her request. Not hearing a response, he moved on to the second agenda item.

2) **Harris Center for Conservation Education – Request to Temporarily Close Jordan Road For Up to Six Nights in March and April – Migrating Amphibians**

Chair Greenwald asked to hear from the petitioner.

Brett Amy Thelen of 83 Kings Highway in Hancock, NH, stated that she is the Science Director at the Harris Center for Conservation Education. She continued that some members of the Committee are familiar with the Salamander Crossing Brigade program, which is a volunteer effort the Harris Center has been coordinating for more than 15 years. It is focused on the spring amphibian migration, a natural phenomenon when thousands of salamanders and frogs migrate to their breeding wetlands. In places where they have to cross roads, roadkill is a serious conservation concern. Over the years, the Harris Center has trained more than 1,500 volunteers throughout the Monadnock region to go out on these rainy, spring nights to move amphibians across the road by hand, to prevent them from getting hit by cars. The volunteers keep count of the amphibians too, so the Harris Center has data about where the “crossing hot spots” are and

which species are there. In Keene, the biggest crossing sites are North Lincoln Street and Jordan Road. At North Lincoln Street, the Harris Center has been working with the City since 2018 to close the road on nights when they think there will be a significant amphibian migration, for the safety of those amphibians and to create a safe place for families to come watch this incredible spectacle. That has been a successful effort. During these three seasons, they have ensured the safe passage of nearly 6,000 individual amphibians at North Lincoln Street. Many people have come to see it.

Ms. Thelen continued that the next logical step is to think about the Jordan Road crossing site. It has fewer individual amphibians but is notable due to the presence of the Jefferson complex salamander, which is a species of conservation concern in NH, designated by NH Fish and Game as a “Species of Greatest Conservation Need.” These Jefferson salamanders do not occur at the North Lincoln Street crossing. The Harris Center is seeking permission to expand these amphibian detours up to Jordan Road in the same way that they have done on North Lincoln Street. One exception is that Jordan Road cannot be closed entirely, the way that North Lincoln Street is. With North Lincoln Street, emergency vehicles can remove the barricade if needed; otherwise, no cars are coming through. Jordan Road has residents who need to be able to get to their homes, so the Harris Center requests it be closed to through traffic. As a result, they would not encourage members of the public or families to come there, for safety concerns. They would just have the trained volunteers, in proper safety attire, at that site. North Lincoln Street would still be a place where families could come to see the migration.

Chair Greenwald asked if the Harris Center would do any public information for the residents on Jordan Road, such as telling them to go on Concord Road instead. Ms. Thelen replied that they could. She continued that this was first proposed in 2020, and then COVID-19 happened, and from an emergency management perspective, they were not sure about gathering on the road themselves for the amphibian crossing. They canceled it due to COVID-19. At that time, they did send a letter to all the residents on Jordan Road with some information about what the closures would entail. The Harris Center could do that again, if the MSFI Committee requests that. They would need the City to give them the current list of residents and their mailing addresses.

Chair Greenwald replied that it is not that many homes. He continued that if the Harris Center gets something to their mailboxes, he is sure the residents would cooperate.

Chair Greenwald asked if the Committee had any more questions or comments. Hearing none, he asked to hear from staff. Public Works Director Kürt Blomquist asked Duncan Watson, Assistant Public Works Director, to speak.

Duncan Watson stated that staff has been working with the Harris Center for a number of years, getting the North Lincoln Street program to be successful. He continued that not only is it good for the amphibians, of course, but it has been great for the citizens who are interested in amphibians and their migratory patterns to learn about them on site. As Ms. Thelen mentioned,

Jordan Road was the next logical step. They have spoken with the Keene Police Department to get the KPD's concerns about the detours, assuring them and the Fire Department that the proposed detours would not hinder emergency vehicle access in any way. The public education campaign and the notification would extend not just to the Jordan Road residents, but also the normal social media channels to let people know, because the circumstances of the amphibian crossing coincide with a certain type of weather. It needs to be a rainy night, with a temperature of over 50 degrees, and amphibians always do their crossing after dark. Ms. Thelen gave the statistic about how many amphibians have been counted, but that is how many were counted while the volunteers were there. Mr Watson noted he does not know if they extrapolated the data. The volunteers may go home around midnight, but more amphibians continue to cross throughout the course of the night. Many thousands of amphibians are saved by [the road closures and volunteer efforts], and he thinks that is something for Keene to be proud of.

Chair Greenwald stated that he lives on the corner of Jordan Road, and it is so meaningful to see all of these children and parents there with their flashlights, in the rain, looking for these tiny salamanders. He continued that it is very life affirming. He asked if there was any further comment from the public or the Committee. Hearing none, he asked for a motion.

Councilor Filiault made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Workman.

On a vote of 5-0, the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee recommends the City Council authorize the closing of Jordan Road from Concord Road to Peg Shop Road for up to six nights in March and April that are coordinated with City staff when conditions are favorable for amphibian migration. City staff may cancel the closure and/or reopen the road at any time if deemed necessary for the convenience and safety of the public. Further, future requests for the closing of Jordan Road for amphibian mitigation are administratively handled by the City Manager.

Councilor Williams stated that he thanks Ms. Thelen and the Harris Center for everything they have done for amphibians in Keene. He continued that his mother has sent him articles from the Washington Post that highlight this program that goes on in Keene. This is nationally recognized and very special. He is a neighbor of North Lincoln Street, and recommends that anyone, especially people with children, go down and participate in this activity.

1) Loretta Simonds – Damage to a Sewer Line and House Foundation at 79 Woodburn Street and a Request to Remove a Nearby City Tree

Chair Greenwald returned to the first agenda item, stating that he sees that Loretta Simonds is not present. He recognized City staff.

Mr. Blomquist stated that he had the opportunity to go visit with Ms. Simonds and look at the situation. He continued that he would like to note that the home is up for sale. He has also been contacted by the potential buyers. His recommendation this evening is to place this item on

more time, to evaluate [the situation]. If the tree will be considered for removal, he needs to look at it and see whether it is healthy or not. Also, there may be a change in property ownership.

Chair Greenwald stated that he would like to note that the tree is more than 20 feet from the house. He continued that Ms. Simonds is not present, so as much as he dislikes placing items on more time, this is a time to do that. He asked for a motion.

Councilor Roberts made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Williams.

On a vote of 5-0, the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee placed Loretta Simonds' communication about damage to a sewer line and house foundation at 79 Woodburn Street and her request to remove a nearby City tree on more time.

Councilor Williams stated that if Mr. Blomquist looks at this tree and considers that maybe it should be removed, he would love to hear about potential replacements for a street tree in that area.

2) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Greenwald adjourned the meeting at 6:13 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Edits submitted by,
Terri Hood, Assistant City Clerk