

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

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

**Monday, April 15, 2024**

**4:30 PM**

**Room 22,  
Recreation Center**

**Members Present:**

Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Chair  
Councilor Andrew Madison, Vice Chair (4:40 PM)  
Councilor Robert Williams  
Ken Bergman  
Steven Bill (Teams; Non-Voting)  
Barbara Richter  
Eloise Clark, Alternate  
Thomas Haynes, Alternate  
John Therriault, Alternate  
Lee Stanish, Alternate (Voting)  
Deborah LeBlanc, Alternate (Voting)

**Staff Present:**

Corinne Marcou, Administrative Assistant

**Members Not Present:**

Art Walker

**1) Call to Order**

Chair Von Plinsky called the meeting to order at 4:31 PM.

**2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – March 18, 2024**

Revisions: 1) remove Brian Reilly from the membership list, 2) capitalize the word “Lower” on line 35, and 3) change “111” to “1,100” on lines 117 and 144.

A motion by Councilor Williams to adopt the March 18, 2024 minutes as amended was duly seconded by Ms. Richter and the motion carried unanimously.

**3) Report-Outs:**

**A) Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Subcommittee**

Mr. Haynes reported that:

- The Subcommittee would likely not meet formally in April, and the next formal meeting would be May 10.

- The Subcommittee was seeking volunteers for a spring clean-up workday on April 27.
- The Subcommittee was also considering a week-long training session with Lew Shelley of SnowHawk, LLC. Mr. Haynes had walked the Lower Drummer Hill Trail with Mr. Shelley, and they identified three spots to work on. Further trail work was on hold until more news about funding.
- There was nothing to report about the potential bridge below the spillway until the Department of Environmental Services responds about the feasibility in that location.
- A bird walk with Steve Lamonde was scheduled for 8:00 AM on Saturday, May 18. Sign-up by calling the Parks and Recreation Department.
- The Subcommittee would be participating in Green Up Keene on Saturday, April 20, meeting at the South Trailhead.

Chair Von Plinsky encountered some people at Goose Pond a few days before this and they were very excited about the trail improvements.

### **B) Invasive Species**

Councilor Williams shared the initial schedule for invasive species removal events this year:

- Tuesday, May 14 at 5:30 PM at the Stone Arch Bridge north of the City.
  - Small groups had addressed the abundant invasives there several times. The goal was to have a larger group this year.
- June date to be determined with the Rotary Club, which would volunteer at this event at Ellis-Harrison Park.
  - There was one Japanese knotweed removal event at this location in 2023, but there is still a significant area of knotweed there.
- Tuesday, July 16 at 5:30 PM at Woodland Cemetery.
  - There was success at this location in 2023.
- August to be determined – contact Councilor Williams with location ideas.
- September to be determined – contact Councilor Williams with location ideas.
- Monday, October 14 (Indigenous Peoples Day) at 5:30 PM at Robin Hood Park.
  - This location had been addressed for several years.
- Monday, November 11 (Veterans Day) at 5:30 PM at the Rail Trail and Eastern Avenue.
  - A return visit to remove vines.

Vice Chair Madison arrived.

### **C) Land Conservation**

The work group had not met.

### **D) Neighborhood Pollinator Garden**

Mr. Therriault reported that representatives of the Cheshire County Conservation District visited the site and suggested that instead of scattering seed mix, they should explicitly plant larger plants in the center near the flagpole and smaller plants toward the border. The neighbors chose to follow this recommendation, which will increase the footprint (an additional 5'–6' in diameter) and costs slightly, but the plantings will be funded by a grant from the Cheshire County Conservation District. There will be minimal work on the project in 2024, except for removing the turf and solarizing the area. Mr. Bergman asked if there would be signage to raise awareness and identify what is there. Mr. Therriault replied that the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation (administrators of Bee City USA) has a pollinator garden sign that he would purchase and donate. Chair Von Plinsky said this should remain on the agenda.

**E) Gunn Rd.**

Chair Von Plinsky recalled several months of reports on a Gunn Road subdivision application, which the Conservation Commission did not support. The Chair said he was happy to report that the Planning Board (PB) voted 4–4, denying the application. He learned that if some other PB members had been present, the vote would have gone against the Conservation Commission's recommendation. He thanked everyone for their efforts, and members of the PB had expressed appreciation as well. In reading the minutes of the PB meeting, Mr. Bergman said he was very impressed by their time-consuming efforts on all projects.

**4) Discussion Items:**

**A) Land Purchase on Old Gilsum Rd.**

[This report ensued earlier in the meeting, during agenda item 3. C. Land Conservation.]

Chair Von Plinsky reported that the City purchased a property on along Old Gilsum Road, TMP 218-009-000 for \$67,000, which comes from the Land Use Change Tax Fund, leaving approximately \$135,000 in that Fund. He said it was harder to convince the City Council than he anticipated, and said there were some interesting questions concerning housing that he appreciated. The property will be integrated with surrounding conservation properties. Chair Von Plinsky credited Deputy City Manager, Andy Bohannon, for this effort.

**B) Update on the Downtown Infrastructure Trees**

Another presentation was scheduled for April 24 at City Hall as a part of the downtown infrastructure project. Another public meeting on the project was scheduled for. Chair Von Plinsky strongly encouraged the Commissioners to stay abreast of the project and opportunities for public comment. This should remain on the agenda.

**C) Keene Meadow Solar Station Project Update**

There was no update.

**D) Potential Land Purchase Update (Rt 9/Washington St. Ext. Properties)**

Chair Von Plinsky said there was no update on these properties owned by Hull Forest Products. Ms. Marcou reported that the City received several phone calls about potential activity on the southern of the two parcels. A City representative visited the site and confirmed that there was no construction or activity, based on concerns voiced at the March meeting. The properties remain for sale. Ms. Marcou added that the owners are very limited in what they can do there because there is no access to the property from a roadway.

Ms. Clark wondered whether—in the long run—this would work to the City’s advantage in bringing the price down Chair Von Plinsky said he hoped so, noting that Hull Forest Products was very interested in selling them, and had called several conservation entities trying to sell but the arrangement did not align with their conservation goals. However, it might align with Keene’s conservation goals, so he hoped that over time something would work out.

Chair Von Plinsky was very motivated to acquire these properties, so he would not let them fall from the City’s radar, and he offered to speak with Hull Forest Products’ realtor. He recalled that the asking price was \$85,000 for both parcels together. To date, the owners were not interested in selling the properties individually. Ms. Richter suggested that it could be worth getting a verbal appraisal from another real estate agent to have a better idea of the appraised value. The City will no pay more than fair market value. Chair Von Plinsky offered to talk with the Community Development Director, Jesse Rounds, again about getting an appraisal. The Chair hoped to build momentum so this opportunity would not get away.

Mr. Bergman imagined that a standard tool in real estate these days would be drone photography and video (might be prohibited over private property). He said the pattern of lumber extraction on the northern parcel was unclear, making it harder to estimate the property value.

The Commission looked at the parcels on a map. Ms. Richter said the timber tax charge should indicate how much timber was extracted; she thought that if the City had a record of how much timber value was extracted, it might force a lower asking price. The Commission was unclear about whether the appraised value would be from before or after the timber harvest. Discussion continued about the properties, including comparison to the recent property purchased on Old Gilsum Road. Chair Von Plinsky thought Hull Forest Products’ asking price might be higher than before. The Commission recalled that Timberlane Drive was used for timber extraction.

Discussion continued about how much land has been conserved in Keene. Chair Von Plinsky said that determination had been quite challenging, especially with complex distinctions between properties zoned as conservation (less ideal) and those with easements in perpetuity (preferred). Mr. Bergman recalled that NH law requires an inventory of lands, including conserved lands.

Ms. Richter said that as a part if the City’s Natural Resource Inventory (NRI), there should have been an inventory of protected lands. She said that GRANITView—an online University of NH

(UNH) mapping program—is a good place to start to determine what lands are protected; that is where she gets her Wildlife Action Plan data. Chair Von Plinsky shared his experience with GRANITView and finding properties marked as fully protected, for which there was no evidence of that protection, or he knew the extent of the protection was only being zoned as conservation. Ms. Richter offered to help, noting that sometimes there are details about whether a property is fee-owned or deed restricted, for example. She said that sometimes a property fee-owned by a town could be perfectly legitimate as a conservation property because it likely has some history, so it would be very hard to change its use to something that contradicts conservation. Mr. Bergman added that Keene’s Tax Parcel Map lists lot numbers, owners, purchase dates, and evaluations. Ms. Richter said all of that data should be in GRANITView too, but the settings to unveil that data can be tricky. If any GRANITView data is outdated, etc., Ms. Richter could help get that information to UNH.

Ms. Marcou showed a map depicting all the conservation lands in Keene. Ms. Richter thought this data would overlap with GRANITView.

Ms. Clark recalled that the Hull Forest Products property north of Rt-9 is connected to the Greater Goose Pond Forest. Mr. Haynes and others recalled that the Department of Parks and Recreation was more interested in the southern parcel because of Beaver Brook Falls and the road, Washington St. Ext., for public access. Chair Von Plinsky reiterated that the asking price for the southern parcel was \$85,000, compared to what Hull Forest Products paid for both parcels—\$45,000—before harvesting the timber. Ms. Richter suggested contacting Tad Lacey, a realtor and forester (and former Keene Conservation Commission member), who she thought might help with an informal property valuation.

#### **E) Airport Proposed Wildlife Control Fence Update**

Mr. Bergman reported that there was a letter from the Swanzey Conservation Commission in the meeting packet indicating their intention to conduct a Natural Resource Inventory (NRI), which he presumed would include the Airport. He recalled the Airport Director, David Hickling, saying that the approval process for their, the City’s, work would require an NRI too. So, he wondered if there were two distinct efforts. He also wondered whether there would be an occasion for the Keene Conservation Commission to learn about Swanzey’s understanding of the Airport’s future is. He was curious what had been disclosed to them and whether they were privy to the commitments the Airport Director made to the Keene Commission, and to what degree. He recalled that the Swanzey Conservation Commission was involved with the solar field established at the Airport, which included tree clearing, and the Keene Conservation Commission was not involved. Mr. Bergman suspected that the Airport Director did not tend to stay in communication with the Keene Commission, so Mr. Bergman thought it would be useful to hear about what the Swanzey Commission might be deciding in this case and what they expect in the future. Mr. Bergman suggested inviting the Swanzey Commission to one of these meetings or scheduling a joint meeting. He knows the Swanzey Commission’s chair and he (or others with connections) are welcome to reach out.

Ms. Marcou offered to get an update. She noted that the City Manager, Elizabeth Dragon, signed Swanzey's Natural Resource Assessment I.

**F) NHDOT Route 101 Project**

There were no updates.

**G) Outreach:**

**i) *Chronolog Update – \$200 per chronology per year/per location***

Chair Von Plinsky recalled a discussion about this Chronolog monitoring tool during the March 2023 meeting. It allows the public to submit photos of specific sites over time to visualize environmental change. Unfortunately, it is expensive (includes a sign), so he and Ms. Marcou discussed contacting other conservation commissions (e.g., Fitzwilliam) or entities (e.g., Cheshire County Conservation District, which is interested in working more with other towns' conservation commissions) to consider a bulk rate. As a software developer and entrepreneur, Councilor Williams reiterated how expensive it was for this very simple application. Some accounts had been paid with grant funding. Councilor Williams thought the watercress removal at the Airport would be a good example for tracking over time, as well as the Edgewood community pollinator garden. The Commission is under no obligation to use Chronolog, but it is worth determining if there could be a better price. Chair Von Plinsky said he would contact the Cheshire County Conservation District.

**5) New or Other Business**

**A) Letter from Swanzey Conservation Commission – Natural Resource Assessment**

The letter from the Swanzey Conservation Commission was discussed above. They were permitted by the City Manager to enter City property for this effort.

Further new/other business was discussed.

Chair Von Plinsky mentioned the solar project at the Monadnock View Cemetery. He suggested that the Commission conduct a site visit there. Ms. Marcou reported that it is City owned property. It is very flat and minimally wooded, and it cannot be used for the cemetery due to underground utilities. So, the City thought it would be apt for solar panels. She showed the location on a map in relation to Park Avenue and Cedarcrest. She explained that the City reached out to Revision Energy and proposed this lot for solar panels, which are not an approved use in the Conservation District, where the only allowed uses are cemetery, telecommunications, and conservation. Revision Energy received a variance from the Zoning Board of Adjustment for the solar use as well as a setback variance. The next steps would involve permissions from the Planning Board and possibly the City Council. Ms. Clark asked who would get the electricity.

Ms. Marcou said it was yet to be determined; it could be the City, but there had also been conversations with Cedarcrest. There was a brief discussion of challenges with solar uses like this. The Commission agreed to schedule a site visit in May.

Mr. Bill suggested adding the hop hornbeam to the downtown tree list; it was on the list from Michele Chalice in the meeting packet, but not the Commission's list. Ms. Clark agreed that the species likes dry sites and upland areas with well drained soils, so it should be a good addition. It is one of two trees referred to as ironwood.

A motion by Councilor Madison to add the hop hornbeam to the list of recommended trees given to the City Engineer was duly seconded by Mr. Bergman and the motion carried unanimously.

**6) Adjournment – Next Meeting Date: Monday, May 20, 2024**

There being no further business, Chair Von Plinsky adjourned the meeting at 5:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Katrnya Kibler, Minute Taker  
April 18, 2024

Reviewed and edited by,  
Corinne Marcou, Administrative Assistant