

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, July 9, 2024

8:15 AM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Arthur Winsor, Chair
Paul Bocko, Vice Chair
Steve Hooper
Ruzzel Zullo
Suzy Krautmann
Dian Mathews
Kelly Cook, Alternate

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Deputy City Manager
Carrah Fisk-Hennessey, Director of Parks &
Recreation

Members Not Present:

Thomas Haynes, Alternate

1) Welcome & Call to Order

Chair Winsor called the meeting to order at 8:22 AM.

Guests present from the Friends of the Ashuelot Park Arboretum: Leslie Casey & Raynee Carlson.

2) Approval of June 11, 2024 Minutes

Revision: line 37, the times listed should be 11:00 AM–2:00 PM.

A motion by Ms. Krautmann to adopt the June 11, 2024 minutes as amended was duly seconded by Vice Chair Bocko. The motion carried unanimously.

3) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon reported that the purchase order for Bartlett Tree (\$9,985; listed as “actual” because already accounted for in budget) was complete and the work would be completed soon. He had processed Ms. Carlson’s reimbursement (\$328.51) on July 8. Mr. Bohannon also received a proposal from Mark Johnson (\$3,800) for cutting perennials and removing debris from landscaped beds; he will install approximately 8–10 yards of loam, mulch, and leaves in the landscaped beds. This work will occur in October–November 2024, after most leaves have fallen. Discussion ensued about using compost instead of loam, which is possible, and the leaves would be top dressing over that; the

Board agreed that compost should be used instead of loam because it should cause the leaves to break down quicker. There was also a question of whether the perennials must be cut, but the Board agreed that leaving the perennials uncut would make it harder to do the other work. The Board and Mr. Bohannon agreed that Mr. Johnson's rate had always been fair. Chair Winsor asked if this would include shredding leaves, and Mr. Bohannon said the proposal listed returning the leaves to the landscaped beds.

4) **Report from the Friends of the Ashuelot River Park Arboretum**

Ms. Mathews said the Friends had been meeting primarily via Zoom recently. The Friends had several ongoing projects:

- Cutting and pulling out Japanese knotweed along the lower bank and near the large stone benches, among other locations. Without the knotweed for competition, the Friends observed that many native species (e.g., ferns) were thriving. Discussion ensued briefly about methods of knotweed eradication (e.g., drying or burning).
- There was a Canadian lily in full bloom, and all were encouraged to go see it. Last year, seedlings were observed beside it. A meadow-rue and elderberry were also in bloom.
 - The Friends requested that the herbicide contractor not apply herbicide in this area, as well as the area near Starbucks. Mr. Bohannon would ask the City's Civil Engineer, Brett Rusnock, who will oversee this contract, to be attentive to these areas. The professional herbicide contractor would also be working at Ladies' Wildwood Park, and they are working with the Highway Division on Beaver Brook, south of Water Street.
 - The Board agreed that it needs a plan for addressing other invasives in the Arboretum/Park; they are everywhere. General public education on invasives is also needed, including proper removal methods.
- The Friends were planning to visit Nasami Farm Nursery in Whately, MA, for their end-of-year sale to purchase perennials.
- When checking on the rain garden, one of the Friends found a large puddle. So, the Friends moved large, flat stones from Ms. Carlson's property to create a middle path, so visitors do not have to walk in the garden. More stones were placed close to the entrance of the bed so water can flow through. The Friends and Mr. Rusnock were considering putting some sand in the rain garden to raise that section. The ground had been impacted and pushed down by machinery, in addition to the excessive rain.
 - Plants are needed to complete the rain garden and finish the grant from the Cheshire County Conservation District. Ms. Mathews will be reimbursed for the plants from the grant funds.
- Other activities:
 - Cleaning-up the daffodil leaves.

- The grass had been axed out of the bed next to the spigot and behind the bench. So, it was replaced with sweet woodruff.
- The allium infiltrating the bed by the kiosk/dogwood was also removed and would be replaced with slow-growing sedum.
- Invasive honeysuckle was hacked out of the section adjoined to the pergola. The Friends had not yet decided what to replace the honeysuckle with.
- The Friends would be addressing the Siberian elms along the Starbucks side of the fence and along the parking lot side of the fence. Planned for July 12.
- The Friends cut back plantings to keep them from overtaking the sidewalk. They had been cut back twice.
- Volunteers from the Old Homestead Garden Club joined the Friends to work in the Arboretum the week of July 1. The Friends alerted the Club that there were no longer volunteer-assigned garden beds in the Arboretum. The Club would likely send volunteers to work in the Arboretum once monthly.
- The Monadnock Shopper News will include an ad calling for volunteers when there is room.
- The Police were called due to a homeless person sleeping on a bench in the park. There was also an instance of a gathering of approximately 6 people for many hours. Also, when clearing knotweed, the Friends found a black plastic bag (behind the new statue) full of items and a smaller bag with medication inside, which was turned in at the Police Station. Discussion ensued about other locations that things like this were found. Sight lines behind Mascoma Bank were improved by volunteers.

Conversation turned to the Friends' next major project: the pollinator garden. One of the Friends' new members is a master gardener and has a connection to a landscape designer, so the Friends were working to schedule a time for them to visit. The Friends would arrange for a machine to come—likely at the end of the year, before the ground is frozen—to create a path through the pollinator garden. Then, landscape fabric would be placed; this could likely be incorporated to Mr. Johnson's work.

Pollinator Palooza was a successful family event, including three native plant vendors. There were also representatives from the City, the Cheshire County Conservation District, the Harris Center, the Caterpillar Lab, and more. There were many activities for kids. The event is expected to grow next year. It aligns well with school vacation.

5) Project Tracking
A) Bird Ecology Project

The Board received the blueprint for completing the two bird houses and two duck houses. The Board would approve funds for Mr. Hooper to purchase lumber to construct the houses, which he expected to be no more than \$50; he would submit receipts to Ms. Fisk-Hennessey. Mr. Hooper would work with Mr. Haynes to create the boxes, ensuring that they are plumb, waterproof, and

durable. They hope to install the houses before snowfall. Vice Chair Bocko would send the digital information to Ms. Fisk-Hennessey and the others.

B) Potential Public Art Installation – Take Flight

The art was installed, and the Friends of the Ashuelot Park Arboretum were landscaping around it.

C) Budget Development - Postponed.

D) Master Plan Implementation Discussion

Discussion ensued about the Park’s Master Plan implementation. Work continues on the kiosk banner, and Chair Winsor shared photos with Ms. Mathews. Chair Winsor met with Ruth Sterling, a graphic artist, who took photos of that section of the Park. Chair Winsor hoped that the sign could be completed before Art in the Park. Mr. Hooper confirmed that he requested photos from Indigenous Peoples Day and Mr. Hooper could help with Photoshop. Mr. Bohannon did not think Mr. Poanessa could complete the sign before Art in the Park. Instead, he suggested a vinyl banner with “coming soon” information and an Art in the Park advertisement. Mr. Bohannon and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey would work on the banner with the Sign Subcommittee including Nicole Cullinane – Parks & Recreation Staff – and with Gem Graphics to hopefully hang by mid-August. This should remain on the agenda.

6) Upcoming Events

A) Art in the Park: August 31–September 1

Discussion ensued about how it takes the Arboretum/Park a while to recover from the Art in the Park foot traffic. For example, the Park was impacted by regular use on July 4; it was noted that many use the Park to view fireworks on July 4. It was also mentioned that a sign is needed alerting users that dogs must be kept on-leash; this seems to be a particular issue with tourists, and Mr. Bohannon hoped it would resolve now that the dog park is open. Ashuelot River Park is the only one in Keene’s park system with a leash requirement.

B) Monadnock Conservancy Anniversary: October 5, 2024

Mr. Bohannon said that planning was underway, and the Conservancy was in contact with Ms. Fisk-Hennessey. The event could be set up much like Pollinator Palooza. The focus is education, so Antioch University and the Harris Center could be involved, for example. The Conservancy will appear before the City Council’s Planning, Licenses, and Development Committee on July 26 about the compensatory storage issue. He anticipated that the revised plan would work. Chair Winsor suggested a rain garden for compensatory storage and Mr. Bohannon agreed that would essentially be the case. Ms. Mathews asked if the solar array would be ground- or roof-mounted. Mr. Bohannon said that if they do solar, it would be roof-mounted.

7) **New, Other Business**

Ms. Mathews asked about receiving copies of the Board's bylaws. She thought the Board should consider amending the bylaws to alleviate issues with finding volunteers to fill Board seats. Mr. Bohannon explained that as a Mayor-appointed Board, term limits exist so there can be fresh perspectives, which all agreed is important. Mr. Bohannon worked with past Mayors to fill Board seats or allow extended terms to ensure continuity through major projects, like the Master Plan. The bylaws are on the City website and Mr. Bohannon would share the vacancy details with the Board. Mr. Bohannon also advised that it is customary to appoint new officers in January, so he suggested waiting. He had also requested some grace periods during Ms. Fisk-Hennessey's onboarding.

Mr. Bohannon had been working with Ms. Krautmann on accessibility. Mr. Bohannon met with representatives from the State of NH, and they advised that any signs in the Park should be accessible. He would work with Ms. Fisk-Hennessey and Mr. Anderson on the grant. Mr. Bohannon said the sign height is not an issue, but rather having to cross grassy areas to access the signs; placing cobbles might help. Ms. Mathews suggested a 5-year plan, incorporating the Conservancy property and a potential path there from the Park. Mr. Bohannon thought that a 5-year plan following-up on the Master Plan recommendations was a great idea, and he suggested revisiting it this fall. He also thought a 10-year plan might be needed for the Conservancy property.

Conversation turned to the dam project that would come up again in the next few years, as it is programmed in the City's Capital Improvement Program (CIP). There will be another public charet, and there could be educational grant funding related to that.

Conversation moved to literacy walk accessibility. Ms. Mathews was not in favor of a loop through the Arboretum. Ms. Krautmann was in favor of a small portion through the Arboretum. The signs need to be numbered in order for the community to move with the flow of the highlighted story. Ms. Mathews also suggested a map on the kiosk.

8) **Adjournment – Next Meeting: Tuesday, August 13, 2024 at 8:15 AM**

The Board agreed to hold its August meeting. The September meeting would likely be canceled as it is Election Day. There should be no impact due to the November election.

There being no further business, Chair Winsor adjourned the meeting at 9:20 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katryna Kibler, Minute Taker, July 16, 2024

Reviewed and edited by,
Carrah Fisk-Hennessey, Parks & Recreation Director, July 19 2024