

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, November 18, 2024

4:30 PM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Chair
Councilor Andrew Madison, Vice Chair
Councilor Robert Williams
Art Walker
Ken Bergman
Steven Bill
Barbara Richter
Thomas Haynes, Alternate
Deborah LeBlanc, Alternate

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner
Andy Bohannon, Deputy City Manager,
Director of Facilities (left early)
Carrah Fisk-Hennessey, Director of Parks &
Recreation (left early)

Members Not Present:

John Therriault, Alternate

SITE VISIT: At 3:30 PM, before the meeting, a quorum of the Conservation Commission conducted a site visit to the property at 0 Court Street (TMP #228-016-000).

1) Call to Order

Chair Von Plinsky called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM.

Members of the public were present: John Noonan from Fieldstone Land Consultants, Gary Flaherty, Mike Guitard, Eloise Clark, and Kevin Thatcher.

2) Minutes of the Previous Meeting – October 21, 2024

A motion by Vice Chair Madison to adopt the October 21, 2024 minutes was duly seconded by Mr. Walker and the motion carried unanimously.

3) Advice and Comment – Fieldstone Land Consultants, on behalf of owner Guitard Homes LLC, is seeking input from the Commission regarding a potential Cottage Court Development & Surface Water Conditional Use Permit (CUP). The parcel is located at 0 Court Street (TMP #228-016-000) in the Low Density District.

Chair Von Plinsky welcomed John Noonan of Fieldstone Land Consultants, on behalf of the applicant, Mike Guitard and Guitard Homes. Mr. Noonan explained this plan for 31 units at 0 Court Street under the City's new Cottage Court Overlay zoning. Mr. Noonan showed the plans for the three phases of the project, including a wetland crossing in Phase 1. He recalled walking the site with Commissioners and showing where the larger channel would be in phase one. He showed where the smaller channel would be toward the top near the trail along the back portion of the property in Phase 2. In Phase 3, he showed where the houses would be more spread out to target families with children compared to the higher density below. Phase 1 would connect to the Genesis HealthCare site. He pointed out where the water, sewer, and parking services would begin, end, or be extended on site; there would be a new curb cut and ultimately, water and sewer would be extended up to the rear of the lot. He showed an aerial view of the main wetland channel and a location that would be either a bridge or box culvert. He showed where there would be a much smaller second crossing toward the back of the site. He also showed a road that would go into Phase 3—where the group stood during the site visit—where the trail crosses.

Mr. Noonan continued, explaining that the project was in the preliminary stage, and the applicant had met with the Planning Board (PB) and the Community Development Department to discuss the layout and how to use the Cottage Court Overlay to maximize the site for as many houses as possible. At this time, the applicant was seeking preliminary feedback and comments from the Commission that could be addressed moving forward as the site was designed; they sought the same input from the PB. He also explained that instead of seeking a blanket reduction of the wetland buffer, the applicant would be asking for a reduction only in the areas with houses implemented in the buffer (and the wetland crossings) and not for the entire site, because they anticipate meeting the wetland buffer requirement for much of the site without any impact. They sought the Commission's feedback on this plan in addition to the wetland crossings. In addition to the City's permitting, there would be State permitting for sewer connections, Alteration of Terrain, and for the Wetlands Bureau. As a part of the Alteration of Terrain, they would also be submitting to the Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee (ARLAC) because the work will be within ¼-mile of the Ashuelot River.

Chair Von Plinsky thanked the applicant for seeking the Commission's advice in advance, which was not always the case. Similarly, he appreciated that the applicant was trying to design around the wetland buffer, which he said was also not always the case.

Mr. Bill asked what the minimum wetland buffer would be. Mr. Noonan said 30 feet would be maintained as much as possible. He said the wetland crossings would have a buffer impact and although they had not yet designed the stormwater management systems, those would likely impact some of the buffer too. He said that in all areas possible, they would try to maintain 30 feet.

Vice Chair Madison asked if there was any concern for stormwater runoff from the hill to the northeast and if so, what plans there were to mitigate. Mr. Noonan said that these are substantial watersheds, so between the stormwater and crossing designs, the applicant would have to

demonstrate plans on the mapping for this significant runoff from the higher grounds down to the crossings. Councilor Madison asked what storm event they were planning for. Mr. Noonan said it would be for two-, 10-, and 50-year storm events. In addition, the wetland crossings must pass a 100-year event for the Wetland Permit.

Chair Von Plinsky said he appreciated the plan to apply for individual impacts to the wetland buffer vs. a blanket impact because he thought it would be easier to keep everything in context. Mr. Noonan appreciated the feedback.

Ms. Clark said she had some concerns about the steepness of the drop-off on the bottom right area. Mr. Noonan indicated an area on the map where some sheds were portrayed to demonstrate that during the design, some of the homes would be rotated and pulled away from the steeper edge.

Mr. Bill said that—given the vagrancies of climate—he encouraged the applicant to consider higher storm recurrence intervals of at least 100 years, given what was unknown at this point. Chair Von Plinsky agreed that any time it is possible to plan for a bigger event, it is better. Vice Chair Madison knew that a 100-year event was required for the permit but said that 100-year events were starting to occur annually or biannually.

Mr. Noonan concluded his presentation by showing photos of the three styles of single-family homes they planned to build to meet the Cottage Court Overlay (shown in the meeting packet). All would be under 1,250 feet of average gross floor size, with options for garages or sheds.

Chair Von Plinsky thanked the guests for the presentation.

Mr. Noonan, Mr. Guitard, and Mr. Thatcher left the meeting.

4) Discussion Items:

A) Citywide Approach/Strategy for Invasive Species Management

Chair Von Plinsky led a discussion on the letter he drafted based on the Commission's discussion and decision to communication with the City Council about a Citywide approach to invasive species management. He welcomed Deputy City Manager, Andy Bohannon, and the Director of Parks & Recreation, Carrah Fisk-Hennessey. The Chair said his goal in the letter was to outline concerns (e.g., infrastructure deterioration and the need for staff training) the Commission detailed during their October 21, 2024 meeting, as shown in their adopted minutes. He said the Commission was not asking the Council to write a blank check on this issue, and the Commission was trying to provide some legitimate solutions to face this problem that would involve the public and would be less costly for the City. Chair Von Plinsky asked for any suggested revisions.

Mr. Bill advised replacing the word “suggestion” with “recommendation.”

Chair Von Plinsky asked if the staff members had any advice. Mr. Bohannon reminded the Commission that what they were looking for would have a budget impact. He said he had early conversations with Ms. Fisk-Hennessey and the Public Works Director, Don Lussier, about where this could fall in the City's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and how it would be managed. He recalled that in the past, the City had a "Tree Warden," which was a stipend position identified in the City's budget. A few years ago, the City eliminated all stipend positions, so that dedicated focus on trees went away and now, the City needed to determine how to incorporate those functions into an existing staff job description; early conversations considered housing this function in the Public Works Department. Mr. Bohannon agreed that these challenges were prevalent, and the City could not continue hiring contractor-after-contractor to address these issues. Mr. Bohannon also agreed with Chair Von Plinsky's letter that recent work on Beaver Brook did not occur properly, so he agreed that greater City staff education would be the biggest piece of this puzzle. He emphasized that invasives education would be critical for the public as well (i.e., identification and management), which the Public Works Director was considering. So, Mr. Bohannon said he thought this letter to the Council would push City staff to identify something through the budget process and see if it aligns with what the Conservation Commission is looking for. Ms. Brunner would be a part of those conversations and Councilors Williams and Madison could be as well.

Chair Von Plinsky said one thing he worked into the letter that the Commission hoped would be helpful budgetarily was the concept of organizing citizen volunteers whom the City could educate and empower to be a part of the invasives solution on public lands. He recalled the lengthy discussion about this concept with a Keene resident, master gardener, and invasives expert, Bob Milliken, at the Commission's October 21, 2024 meeting, as described in those adopted minutes. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey said that a similar concept had worked well with the Friends of the Arboretum at Ashuelot River Park (non-profit), whose master gardeners take initiative to identify invasives and eradicate as much as they can, usually by hand. She thought it was a model that could be adopted in other proper spaces with well-informed volunteers.

Mr. Bohannon thought there was a potential grant the City could apply for from Volunteer NH focused on volunteer training and education. He recalled that a few years ago, there was an organic pesticide initiative (approximately \$2,000) for City and Keene State College staff and interested members of the public, specifically about how ball fields and parks were being treated. He said it was very well received but noted that changing to organic for athletic fields is a time consuming and challenging shift. He added that South Portland, ME, had been the national leader in that shift. While learning more would take time, he thought the City's Superintendent of Maintenance, Pepper Anderson, would be open to these ideas and considering new practices. Mr. Bohannon also hoped that pursuing this Volunteer NH grant would be an opportunity for more education.

Mr. Bill asked how much training about invasives City staff had at this time. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey said "medium," and that they were primarily aware of Japanese knotweed. In terms of actual training, Mr. Bohannon said that at this time, City staff received no specific training on

invasives. Mr. Bill thought that training would be a good place to start, noting that the University of NH Cooperative Extension might be willing to provide a low-cost session. Chair Von Plinsky thought the goal of this letter was to move in that direction and have the City partner with the Commission in this effort.

Councilor Williams asked if anyone on City staff was licensed for pesticide application. Mr. Bohannon and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey confirmed that two staff members were licensed at this time. Councilor Williams said that was one goal of this effort, as well as to consider the City's processes. For example, when is the best time for the City to mow knotweed so volunteers can go later in the year and pull the rest? He hoped to see a coordinating mechanism.

Ms. LeBlanc noted how many different invasive species there are and asked if the City provided any educational resources for citizens. Chair Von Plinsky said he wanted to focus on that in the letter too. Councilor Williams thought that coordination between the Commission, City, and perhaps the UNH Extension could lead to some citizen training. Councilor Williams had spoken with people who were interested in having their own group to take care of an invasive in their neighborhood but were unsure if they were allowed to or how. So, he imagined a course on a weekend afternoon to educate citizen volunteers and coordinate locations on City property. He thought an effort like that in Keene would help. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey said there were "baby steps" happening. She referred to a citizen in the East Keene Group who contacted her directly asking for a full list of invasives in Russell Park and for permission to pull them; Ms. Fisk-Hennessey gave permission and the resident left big piles for the Parks crews to pick up. Councilor Williams said it would be significant to publicize that the City was doing that.

Mr. Bill suggested that the Keene Public Library would be an ideal location to have information available to citizens on invasives because the information could be clearly laid out. If possible, Ms. Richter also suggested links from the City's website to the many resources available on the UNH website and the Department of Agriculture website. She also suggested encouraging a few more citizens to attend the Invasives Academy as Councilor Williams had; instructors from the Invasives Academy might be willing to come and present in Keene for a day if there was a good group here.

Chair Von Plinsky thought it would be important to have a clear statement from the City of what would be allowed: what, when, and where. He had spoken to people who really wanted to help but were unsure where they could.

Mr. Bill asked about having a contact person and if it would be difficult to arrange. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey thought that might have been a part of the Public Works Director's consideration, but she said that would be a very significant challenge for the Parks and Recreation Department at this time.

Councilor Williams recalled Mr. Bohannon mentioning a past budget for a Tree Warden, which seemed like an appropriate way to approach this to the Councilor. Councilor Williams asked if

what that stipend was approximately. Mr. Bohannon thought it was fairly minimal, like \$5,000/year. He thought the Public Works Director was trying to get creative with the team he was trying to build and his vision, so Mr. Bohannon thought it might get addressed that way. Otherwise, he thought there might be a way to bring the Invasives Academy to Keene as Ms. Richter mentioned, and he said he would work with Ms. Fisk-Hennessey to execute some more ideas.

A motion by Councilor Williams to approve the invasive species letter as written by Chair Von Plinsky was duly seconded by Vice Chair Madison. The motion carried unanimously.

Discussion ensued about where the letter could go after the City Council. Councilor Williams hoped the Mayor would forward it to the Council's Municipal Services, Facilities, & Infrastructure (MSFI) Committee for a valuable public conversation about the issue before forwarding it to City staff. Vice Chair Madison said he and Councilor Williams could both email the Mayor in advance specifically asking him to forward it to MSFI, after which the procedure would be for it to go back to the City Council and then on to City staff. The Vice Chair agreed that MSFI would give the issue a public forum with staff and Councilors present, which Chair Von Plinsky said was his goal. Vice Chair Madison confirmed that his hope would be for staff to report back to MSFI with ideas in a few months, potentially January.

B) Red Pine Scale and Future Impacts to City Parklands (Andy Bohannon)

Chair Von Plinsky said this item would be addressed by Mr. Bohannon and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey again. Mr. Bohannon recalled that prior to Ms. Fisk-Hennessey joining the City, he had a conversation with Steve Roberge from the UNH Cooperative Extension about the future impacts of red pine scale on the City. At that time, red pine scale had devastated Bear Brook Forest and other areas on the seacoast. Given the amount of red pine in Keene, there was concern for the pest coming to Keene eventually. When developing the City's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) in the last two years, staff decided it was time to assess the City's red pine monoculture; with the help of a consultant, the City developed a flexible dollar figure.

Earlier in 2024, the UNH Extension contacted the City about the extent to which the red pine scale had devastated the Yale Forest in Swanzey, two miles from Keene. The wind carries the red pine scale insect up to one mile. The UNH Extension was in the process of writing a column in the Keene Sentinel alerting readers to this invasive species that would be published after City staff present this issue to the City Council's MSFI Committee; staff asked them to wait to publish until after the public presentation. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey shared photos of other locations red pine scale had been detected throughout NH. The invasive pest gets under the bark and pierces the tree, sucking the life from it, and killing it from the bottom of the crown to the top, usually within six months of the pest being found. This is concerning because of the red pine monocultures in Keene.

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey explained that forestry experts from the UNH Extension and NH Division of Forests & Lands visited the City (less than two weeks before this meeting), provided a lot of education, and went on a site visit of Ladies' Wildwood Park. During conversations, she said the experts expressed the most concern for Wheelock Park and Dinsmoor Woods because the invasive would completely change the view of both parks. They were less concerned for Ladies' Wildwood Park and Robin Hood Park because they do not have the same extensive monocultures of red pines.

Many ideas came from these conversations. For example, if the red pines are harvested alive, the timber could have value. The experts were very clear that no stand of red pine infested with red pine scale had ever survived it. Once these monocultures of red pine die from the infestation, Ms. Fisk-Hennessey said the City would have to pay to harvest them at a significant cost. One consultant from the UNH Extension suggested taking out one tract of three rows of red pine by the youth baseball fields at Wheelock Park as a pilot experiment to show the community what it would look like while the City works on what will have to be very thoughtful reforestation. A mix of deciduous and coniferous trees could be replanted to ensure a significant canopy in the future to help grow the City's parks back differently. Chair Von Plinsky said the City would need to learn from its monoculture mistakes of the past and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey agreed, noting that was the biggest takeaway from her conversation with these forestry experts. That red pine response to the 1938 hurricane had reached its life expectancy and this invasive could speed it up even more.

Mr. Bergman commented on how losing those stands of red pine would drastically change the appearance of Maple Avenue. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey agreed but shared a positive: there was a lot of undergrowth in that area, so once the red pines are gone, the undergrowth would be able to thrive.

Mr. Bergman asked if this was also a threat to white pine and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey said no.

Chair Von Plinsky asked about the next step. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey said it would be this pilot program to remove the three rows of red pines at Wheelock Park. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey said she learned about a machine called a "forest mulcher" that—once the red pines are removed—would dig down six inches to completely eradicate the roots as well. The experts suggested a demonstration day to eliminate the stumps and get the community excited about what the machine can do. Eradicating those roots would provide a great foundation for planting new trees. Mr. Bergman asked if the time of year would matter for this culling, and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey said she was unsure, but the experts suggested taking the trees down in winter.

Mr. Haynes said it sounded like this could be a possible educational event with potential income from harvesting the trees. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey agreed.

Ms. Richter asked why Dinsmoor Woods was not considered as a site, since it seemed like time was a limitation. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that site had not been evidenced yet, but the City

knew the invasive was coming. Ms. Richter noted how close Dinsmoor is to Wheelock and that it could be a lot more challenging to plan for, so in her opinion, it would also make sense to remove some trees there sooner than later. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey noted that a few years ago, the City removed 150 trees there. Mr. Bergman mentioned the knotweed growing in Dinsmoor Woods too.

Mr. Bohannon said the tree experts also recognized that in addition to educational sessions on the invasive species, it would be ideal to invite the public on site at Wheelock Park to understand and imagine both the process and what the site would be like after the harvest. Fortunately, the experts said they would be willing to come back and assist the City in these efforts, including helping to write the scope of work, particularly as the public often gets anxious about removing trees. Mr. Bill thought that drier conditions would be a fire hazard for those thick trees, which might be one way to sell the proposed change to the public.

Mr. Haynes asked what was needed from the Commission at this time. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey said she is hopeful for this effort to spread awareness, in addition to the upcoming Sentinel article and MSFI presentation. Mr. Bohannon said some of the tree experts would attend the MSFI meeting, noting that they were equally concerned for the entire region. Mr. Haynes said he liked the educational approach because the insect had not reached the City yet. Mr. Bohannon said that only one year ago, it was still anticipated to be several years before the red pine scale would reach Keene. Mr. Bergman did note that there were red pines on private land in the City that the City/Commission could not be sure were not infected at this time. Mr. Bohannon said that the City had actually already cut down a lot of red pine already. He said a challenge with red pines is their shallow root system because—like other monocultures—once they are infected with anything, they die.

Councilor Williams said removing these trees seemed necessary. He wondered whether the trees would have to be replaced with more forest or if there could be another use of the land. For example, he said Keene was lacking meadow space (to only mow once annually) or other alternate habitats that could add diversity. Mr. Bohannon agreed, noting that the Commission would be seeing different management practices coming forward for Ladies' Wildwood Park, which Councilor Williams said would be great.

Mr. Bergman referred to a big gully with hemlock and a wet swampy area in Wheelock Park. He asked if there was a Park property line there or if the whole parcel was being managed as the Park. Mr. Bohannon said no, throughout that area is Tenant Swamp and Wheelock Park is sort of defined on the bank. Mr. Bergman said that aside from the power company, there was still a lot of coniferous, swampy, wet, mossy, woodland there that was full of wildlife.

Chair Von Plinsky and the Commission thanked Mr. Bohannon and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey for this presentation and staying ahead of this invasive species. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey welcomed questions from the Commission at any time and said that Ms. Brunner would be a part of conversations moving forward.

Mr. Flaherty left the meeting.

C) Airport Wildlife Control Fence – Letter of Support for Preferred Alternative

Mr. Bergman provided an update on the proposed wildlife control fence at the Dillant-Hopkins Airport and the letter he drafted (in the meeting packet) on behalf of the Commission in consultation with the environmental analyst consultant, McFarland Johnson, and the Airport Director, David Hickling. The Swanzey Conservation Commission was also submitting a letter for their jurisdiction. Initially, the letter was to be addressed to the to the NH Department of Environmental Services (DES) but ultimately, it was recommended to be included as a part of a bigger package, so it was addressed to Mr. Hickling to be included with the next request for consideration. In the most fundamental sense, DES was trying to protect the wetlands, but Mr. Bergman recalled that the perspective of the Airport administration, consultants, and most of the Conservation Commission was to take a more holistic view regarding the wild lands there to best preserve their inherent values.

Mr. Bergman showed various maps of the Airport property—specifically the two runways and surrounding wetlands. Mr. Bergman used the maps to remind the Commission of the history of the situation that had been described in the Commission’s minutes over time, particularly that there was community concern for the DES’ request to site the needed wildlife control fence along Airport Road, further from the Airport runways, which would inhibit the public’s active wildlife viewing from Airport Road, among other factors. There was a lengthy discussion with the Airport Director at the Commission’s October 21, 2024 meeting, as documented in those adopted minutes. He showed photos of the picnic tables along Airport Road that are used for this recreation.

Mr. Bergman showed the various options for the fence locations at this time that Mr. Hickling had described in detail at the October meeting. He recalled that one alternative was to site the fence within the Federal Aviation Administration’s (FAA) runway object free area (ROFA), which has a series of different zones with clearances required. He showed the ROFA on one map to indicate the Airport Director’s goal at this time to have the FAA approve siting the fence in the ROFA, much closer to the end of the shorter runway where the terrain descends to lower elevations, which might allow the necessary clearances to keep the fence that close to the runway. Still, Mr. Bergman said this option would impinge on the wetlands some, and he recalled that one concern had been identifying and defining the wetland modifications that would occur and distinguishing the temporary impacts from construction vs. the permanent impacts.

Mr. Bergman directed the Commission’s attention to Wilson Pond, which drains under the highway and leads to a few places, one of which is an underground pipe/channel that goes a considerable distance under the runway and drains into the swampy woods and the river. The City land extends all the way up to the river for a considerable distance.

Mr. Bergman showed a map of the wetlands, which had been restudied and redefined. He showed another map of the NH Wildlife Action Plan (WAP) habitat. He showed that the highest WAP category of prioritized wildlife habitat as well as grassland ran all the way around the Airport, which would include grassland nesting birds like sparrows. Mr. Bergman said that this whole area around the Airport was one continuous grouping of habitats that merged, between which energy and wildlife could move. He said these prioritized wildlife corridors would have considerable value. For example, near the entrance to the Airport, there is jack pine, which is an interesting species for this area. Mr. Bergman also showed a map of the highest priority habitats to preserve in Keene, one of which would be fragmented by a fence along Airport Road. He also showed the active wildlife habitat that would be fragmented if the fence was placed along Airport Road.

Mr. Bergman reiterated that the Airport Director's, Conservation Commission's, consultant's, and community's preferred alternative—long-term—had been to site the fence in the ROFA and *not* along Airport Road. However, DES had been pushing back against that alternative because of the wetland impacts, which Mr. Bergman said the Conservation Commission should be sensitive to.

Ms. Richter asked if DES preferred the fence location that Mr. Bergman displayed on the maps in red, and Mr. Bergman said yes, compared to Mr. Hickling and the Commission's preferred location shown in black. Mr. Bergman said the DES had pushed back on this through several rounds of appeals, which he said was not surprising when taking a microscopic view of what protecting wetlands means. He said the consulting environmental analyst from McFarland Johnson (the City's consultant) explained that fragmenting the habitats by cutting off the wetlands and removing the connection to the adjacent wetlands and forests would impact them in a more permanent way. As explained in the report, if the fence was sited along Airport Road, there would be 135 additional acres of wildlife habitat enclosed within the fence on the Airport property, which from the consulting environmental analyst's perspective, would impact the wetland by depriving continuity.

Mr. Bergman explained that he did revise a portion of his draft letter because the consultant indicated that the permanent impacts of the fence on the wetland would be restricted to the construction phase and limited to approximately one square foot for each fence post, which would be every 10 feet along the length of the fence; he pointed out some discrepancies to the consultant between the table and text in the report provided. Mr. Bergman said the consultant felt that the alternative to site the fence along Airport Road would be much worse. So, in the letter, Mr. Bergman tried to provide a holistic view of the wild lands and their values and functions, and to emphasize that the temporary effects would be from construction and longer term impacts would be from placing the fence along the roadway and impeding public enjoyment, recreation, and educational value, in addition to the continuity and functional attributes of the wetlands. Mr. Hickling and the consultants reviewed the draft letter and were comfortable with it, so Mr. Bergman sought the Commission's input. This letter and the Commission's October 2024 minutes would strongly indicate the preferences for Mr. Hickling to make the case to the FAA

and DES. Mr. Bergman recalled Mr. Hickling mentioning that if the fence was not approved in the ROFA, he would consider canceling the project entirely, which would mean losing the costs invested in the project to date and Mr. Bergman said potentially losing credibility with the FAA and Department of Transportation (DOT) by backtracking on a proposed plan.

Vice Chair Madison thought the FAA supported the fence shown in black that would be in the ROFA. Mr. Bergman said that is correct due to the lower grade at the end of the runway. Further, he said that jets rarely use that shorter runway, and the issue is more so the fence required along the sides of the runway. At that location, Mr. Bergman said there was approximately 800 linear feet of wetland and there would be fence posts every 10 feet; each post would be roughly one circular foot of permanent impact, which would not impede the flow of water, energy, vegetation, aquatic creatures, and plants.

To illustrate that this was not a trivial issue, Mr. Bergman showed a photo of a C&S jet that hit a deer and incurred damage. He added that the FAA was not usually willing to issue grants and concede on things like these elevation changes for the fence relocation unless they feel their safety standards have not been met. Unfortunately, the NH DES to date had consistently objected to anything other than the roadway plan, so Mr. Hickling and the consultants were planning to appeal again and share these letters symbolizing the public interest and concern.

Councilor Madison asked if the Commission was effectively issuing a letter of support for the fence closer to the runway. Mr. Bergman said yes, both Mr. Hickling and the consultant had reviewed the letter and approved it.

Ms. Richter recalled a past recommendation from DES to move the fence far out of the wetland that would have to be approved by the FAA. Mr. Bergman said it should be clear that at the end of the shorter runway, there would still be some permanent impact on the wetland, but the greater concern would be on the western edge of the long runway. Ms. Richter thought the DES recommendation was to move the fence more than five feet out of the wetlands. Mr. Bergman said the irony was that there were regulations about fence clearances and shoulders of public roads so that if the fence was moved to Airport Road, it would have to be moved away from the edge of the pavement—because there is no shoulder—and would have to avoid the existing utility poles along the roadway. This could place it in the wetland.

A motion by Vice Chair Madison to approve the letter drafted by Mr. Bergman on behalf of the Conservation Commission to the Airport Director, David Hickling, about the Airport Proposed Wildlife Control Fence, was duly seconded by Mr. Bill.

Mr. Bill said he thought it was a great letter. He suggested changing the first line from “committed to protecting” to “committed to protect.” Mr. Bergman felt that “protecting” anticipated the future. The Commission agreed to leave that language in Mr. Bergman’s hands. Mr. Bergman thought it was key for the Commission to not indicate that it thought the DES was

wrong about wetland protection, but rather that the Commission hopes the DES will consider the different levels and scales of habitat impact.

Mr. Haynes suggested replacing the word “radical” with “intrusive.” The Commission agreed.

The Commission thanked Mr. Bergman for his efforts.

The motion to approve the letter carried with the two suggestions. Mr. Bergman abstained.

D) Keene Meadow Solar Station Project Update

Chair Von Plinsky said there was no update.

E) NHDOT Route 101 Project

Chair Von Plinsky said he checked the project website, and it looked like the next opportunity for public comment would be early 2025.

F) Master Plan Update

Mari Brunner, the City’s Senior Planner, shared an update on the City’s Master Plan Update. The project’s [online discussion boards](#) for the Plan’s six pillars launched the day of this meeting; at this time, the first two pillars had launched: livable housing and thriving economy. This provides the community an opportunity to learn more (i.e., history, macrotrends, snapshot highlights, consultant insights, and potential tradeoffs) and add to the discussion. The data gathered would help the Task Forces and Steering Committee to develop the Implementation Plan. For those who do not use computers, Planning Staff would be available in the Keene Public Library on December 11–13, 10:00 AM–4:30 PM, to assist members of the public in registering their comments. Chair Von Plinsky encouraged Commissioners to participate so that conservation would remain a priority in the Master Plan.

G) Outreach

Chair Von Plinsky thought that Mr. Bohannon and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey outlined the Commission’s opportunity for outreach in terms of preparing the community for the loss of red pines. Mr. Bill asked if there would be a public hearing at some point. Chair Von Plinsky said ultimately yes, and he imagined there would be an announcement, but he thought the Wheelock Park effort would be the first opportunity.

5) Report-Outs:

A) Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Subcommittee

Mr. Haynes reported that since the last meeting, the Subcommittee had two workdays, which included:

- Finished the last of the proposed water bars on the Rope Tow Trail.
- Hung approximately one dozen signs on the Rope Tow Trail and connecting trails.
- Completed general maintenance—mostly cleaning out water bars—on the Rope Tow Trail and connecting trails to prepare for winter.
- Cleaned out water bars on the Loop Trail and Mattson Trail.

Next, Mr. Haynes said the Subcommittee would start planning for 2025. Mr. Haynes, Mr. Walker, and Mr. Bill welcomed thoughts, suggestions, or concerns for the Subcommittee's progress.

Mr. Bill led a Goose Pond Through the Seasons walk about geology on Saturday, November 9, with 10 enthusiastic participants.

Mr. Haynes also shared some data. Since May 2024, the Subcommittee had: 18 scheduled workdays (more unscheduled), installed two new bridges, created four short new reroutes, created over two dozen water bars on various trails (mostly Lower Drummer, Mattson, Rope Tow, and Wild Things), added a new kiosk to the North Trailhead, and a lot of general maintenance on the Loop Trail and connecting trails. In addition, the Subcommittee had outreach efforts with the Goose Pond Through the Seasons walks, the Spring Bird Walk, and the Summer Trails Less Traveled hike. The Subcommittee participated in Green Up Keene this year and collected trash on the Loop Trail. Chair Von Plinsky thanked the Subcommittee, calling this a success story for the Commission.

Mr. Bergman asked when the "No Swimming" signs were removed around Goose Pond. Mr. Haynes was unsure, noting that it is technically not allowed because of the liability without a lifeguard. Ms. LeBlanc said someone had recently asked her about the signs as well. Mr. Bergman wondered where that restriction was written. Mr. Haynes thought it was posted at the North Trailhead sign, but he was unsure it had been posted at the new South Trailhead, so he said he would look into it.

Ms. LeBlanc wondered if the Subcommittee had considered paper maps at the kiosks, noting that people regularly mentioned getting lost to her. Mr. Haynes said it had been on the Subcommittee's list for a long time, so they would discuss it again. He said it was a good point that many members of the public still prefer to use paper, and the map was still hard to access on the City website. Ms. LeBlanc said she used the AllTrails app and when she checked it the week of this meeting, the only trail available was the Loop Trail. Mr. Haynes said it was a good point to try to have other trails be more visible. At this time, he said there were maps at all the trailheads and all the main walking trails had signage (not blazing). Mr. Bill had bought maps for that area and to be available at the Recreation Center in the past and Mr. Haynes said the current map in use was created by the New England Mountain Bike Association because it was the most accurate and the City had not created one. Ms. LeBlanc agreed that more blazing would be

helpful as well, particularly if each trail was a different color. Mr. Haynes agreed that the Subcommittee discussed blazing, in addition to leaf blowing.

B) Invasive Species

Councilor Williams reported on the final invasive species event of the season on November 11 along the Rail Trail at Eastern Avenue with approximately 10 volunteers pulling some bittersweet vines and predominantly some fruiting autumn olive. The Commission thanked Councilor Williams for his efforts.

C) Land Conservation

Chair Von Plinsky reported that he met with Ms. LeBlanc at City Hall a few weeks before this meeting to review the easement monitoring process. Ms. LeBlanc had agreed to take on this effort—with help from the rest of the Commission as needed—to help bring the monitoring back into compliance. She said that so far it had been difficult to find updated/current ways to communicate with the landowners. Chair Von Plinsky and Ms. Richter said they would help.

D) Pollinator Updates

Mr. Therriault was not present to provide an update.

6) New or Other Business

Ms. Clark said that the Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee (ARLAC) would be meeting on November 19 to review two interesting items of business, and she invited the public to attend. First, a Clean Water Revolving Fund application from the City of Keene to upgrade approximately 165 sewer manholes on the east side of Keene. Receiving this grant would allow for applying an epoxy to the inside of the old brick sewer systems that were leaking water into the sewers and adding to the flow. Second, ARLAC was reviewing an Alteration of Terrain permit for the Monadnock Conservancy's new building in the empty lot right next to the Ashuelot River Park. Mr. Bergman noted that a large, single donation was the reason for building there, and Ms. Richter added that the land was donated too. Mr. Bergman said the Conservancy was still raising money.

Chair Von Plinsky announced Cheshire County's Conservation Commission Potluck at Stonewall Farm also on November 19 featuring Josh Megyesy from NH Fish & Game talking about identifying critical road crossings for turtles. It would be the beginning of a big project and community involvement was welcome. Mr. Bergman asked if the Antioch University New England faculty who studied wood turtles was still local, and Ms. Richter said she would check, noting that there would likely be an opportunity to hire a natural resource consultant to help identify a few sites.

Discussion ensued to confirm that the City had officially purchased the Washington Street Extension property near Beaver Brook from Hull Forest Products for \$55,000. This property had been a long-term interest of the Commission. Councilor Williams said the Council discussed it in a private session. Mr. Haynes said it was a reasonable price compared to the previous ask. The Commission was pleased that their recommended purchase to conserve the parcel was successful.

7) **Adjournment – Next Meeting Date: Monday, December 16, 2024**

There being no further business, Chair Von Plinsky adjourned the meeting at 6:09 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katrnya Kibler, Minute Taker
November 25, 2024

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner