

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, December 16, 2024

4:30 PM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Chair
Councilor Andrew Madison, Vice Chair (arrived at 4:47 PM)
Councilor Robert Williams
Art Walker
Ken Bergman
Steven Bill
Thomas Haynes, Alternate (Voting)
John Therriault, Alternate (Voting)

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner

Members Not Present:

Barbara Richter
Deborah LeBlanc, Alternate

1) Call to Order

Chair Von Plinsky called the meeting to order at 4:32 PM.

Guests were present whom the Mayor had nominated to join as members of the Conservation Commission in 2025: Bob Milliken & Gary Flaherty. Former Commissioner, Eloise Clark, was also present.

2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – November 18, 2024

Revisions: Line 374, replace “prioritized wetland” with “prioritized wildlife habitat.” Line 381, replace “wildlife corridors” with “wildlife habitat.” Line 442: replace “upper edge” with “western edge.” Line 458: replace “wetland” with “habitat.” Line 124: strike the word “tree.”

A motion by Mr. Bergman to adopt the November 18, 2024 minutes as amended was duly seconded by Mr. Walker. The motion carried unanimously.

3) Report-Outs:

A) Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Subcommittee

Mr. Haynes reported that the Subcommittee met on December 13. The group went to Goose Pond and visited the South Trailhead and the site of its proposed bridge by the spillway. The group also looked at sites for two possible All Persons accessibility trails—one on the west side of the lower Pond closest to the new parking area (recommended in the Stewardship Plan) and one on the east side of the Pond. The accessibility trail would likely be a future grant project. The group also met that day at the Recreation Center to talk about many things: signage, paper maps, leaf blowing, new bike trails, larger maps at the kiosks at each trailhead, and a list of trail projects for 2025.

Mr. Haynes said that the Subcommittee agreed to pursue the bridge at the spillway in 2025, so they will work with the city engineers to get them on the same page and talk about financing. The Subcommittee wants it to be a community project and to raise money for the bridge. Mr. Bill added that the City Engineer was unable to meet with the group on site at Goose Pond, so the Subcommittee was anxious for staff input because they did not know all the design constraints; for example, would a 300-year flood be an issue? Mr. Haynes said he had one meeting with the City Engineer, Bryan Ruoff, and the Parks & Recreation Director, Carrah Fisk-Hennessey, to share the initial idea and invite them to that Subcommittee meeting at Goose Pond.

Mr. Haynes said the group took measurements for the bridge and they were considering a span of 30–35 feet with cribbing on both sides. The height from where the bridge would sit to where the water comes down off the spillway would be the primary concern, and Mr. Haynes said that was 7–8 feet. Mr. Walker thought that would be critical to the engineers. Mr. Bill said they had guidelines for pricing, but that could change with time and tariffs on materials.

Chair Von Plinsky asked if the Subcommittee needed anything from the rest of the Commission. Mr. Haynes said that the Subcommittee still had questions and would have more information to report in January.

Mr. Bill asked how individuals or companies could donate. Ms. Brunner said that the Conservation Commission can accept gifts through the City Council's approval. Mr. Bill added that Ms. Fisk-Hennessey had been a great influence and help on these things, even showing up to do trail maintenance; he called her very supportive.

Mr. Bergman followed-up on his question about "No Swimming" signage at Goose Pond. Mr. Haynes said he had not visited the North Trailhead to check.

B) Invasive Species

Councilor Williams recalled that in November 2024, the Commission submitted a letter to the City Council regarding a Citywide plan for invasive species, which would be before the Council's Municipal

Services, Facilities, & Infrastructure (MSFI) Committee on December 18. He encouraged his fellow Commissioners to attend and advocate.

C) Land Conservation

No updates.

D) Pollinator Updates

Mr. Therriault reported that Bee City USA introduced an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Plan Toolkit. Since Keene is a Bee City, anyone from City staff could access the files to implement an IPM Plan.

Chair Von Plinsky followed-up on the beehive at the Keene Public Library. Mr. Therriault said the hive did not survive the winter, so in the spring City staff caulked the gap between the bricks and the overhang with expanding foam. He anticipated that there would be another colony there within a few years because it would smell like a beehive for a long time. He had warned staff that expanding foam does not keep them out.

4) Discussion Items:

A) Citywide Approach/Strategy for Invasive Species Management

Chair Von Plinsky reiterated the call for Commissioners to attend the December 18 MSFI Committee meeting to advocate for a Citywide approach to invasive species management. Vice Chair Madison arrived.

B) Airport Wildlife Control Fence Update

Mr. Bergman shared updates after meeting with the Airport Director, David Hickling, earlier this same day. Mr. Hickling was preparing to submit the final application for final approval to begin planning the design of the fence. Mr. Hickling told Mr. Bergman that the environmental consultant from McFarland Johnson was newer to the job and might have been overly intimidated by the people from DES. So, Mr. Hickling consulted the senior environmental consultants at McFarland Johnson, and they reassured him to submit the application and not anticipate any strong objections based upon their knowledge of these proposals and the logical data amassed for this one. Mr. Bergman said that Mr. Hickling emphasized again that if not approved, he would be inclined to pull the project because the alternative for the fence along Airport Road would not be worth the cost to effectively manage the wildlife concern, and it would also destroy the recreational asset there. Chair Von Plinsky thanked Mr. Bergman for liaising with Mr. Hickling on this project.

C) Keene Meadow Solar Station Project Update

No updates.

D) NHDOT Route 101 Project

Chair Von Plinsky referred to an update email (with a link to the project webpage and associated information) from Ms. Brunner about an upcoming presentation on December 19 (5:30 PM materials available, 6:00 PM start) at Heberton Hall. He encouraged participation and input. A brief discussion ensued about the format of the presentation and a project mailing that some Commissioners received.

E) Master Plan Update

Ms. Brunner reported that the Master Planning task forces would start meeting for the first of three months in January 2025, with one task force for each of the six Strategic Pillars identified: Housing, Economy, Transportation, Neighborhoods, Environment, and Workforce. Anyone interested in joining a task force was encouraged to contact Ms. Brunner. Commissioners were also encouraged to participate in the online [Discussion Boards](#) for each Strategic Pillar. For each, there was background information, history, consultant takeaways, and survey results available. The Discussion Board comments would be used to generate ideas for the Master Plan Implementation section, and more participation was needed, so Chair Von Plinsky encouraged his fellow Commissioners to participate. Mr. Bergman noted that “Flourishing Environment” seemed to be the most relevant Pillar to the Commission. Chair Von Plinsky agreed but said the Master Plan Steering Committee had talked about the fact that the Flourishing Environment needs to inform decision making across all the different Pillars.

F) Outreach

Chair Von Plinsky said this was a useful addition to this section of the agenda, but he thought it might tend to get lost because much good was happening in the various work groups. He thought that going forward the Commission should consider whether there is a better way to address outreach monthly.

Mr. Haynes mentioned the ongoing Goose Pond Through the Seasons walks. He also mentioned seeing a winter tree and shrub identification program with Steve Roberge through the University of New Hampshire Extension and he was communicating with him about duplicating that at Goose Pond. Chair Von Plinsky appreciated the work of the Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Subcommittee. Mr. Bill recalled a past request for the Commission to visit the Water Treatment plant at some point as well and asked about those logistics. Mr. Haynes said it was originally Ms. Clark’s idea for the Tap to Toilet program before Covid and before Jim Rousmaniere’s death. The program was going to be about Keene’s history, with site visits to the Water Plant and the Water Treatment Plant. Mr. Bergman added that there had also been an idea to visit the surface water reservoirs in Roxbury. Mr. Haynes encouraged some of his fellow Commissioner’s to organize these programs.

Vice Chair Madison recalled his past idea for a conservation speaker series but said he had not had the ability to lead the effort like he thought he would. So, if other Commissioners had the ability, he encouraged them to organize too and said he could consider it again when his term as a Councilor ends in 2025. He noted that Commission field trips during meetings have to be open to the public, which could become challenging if the numbers are unmanageable. He added that historically, the Water and

Wastewater Departments had been very open and enthusiastically welcomed tours of the Water and Wastewater Treatment Plants; they regularly invited Councilors, schools, and public groups. He anecdotally shared how in New York City, Valentine's Day tours of the sewage treatment plant were very successful. He said it is an important part of how the City stewards the environment and he thought it would be an easy opportunity for annual outreach. Outreach events like those do not typically count as formal Conservation Commission meetings (i.e., needing agendas and minutes).

Mr. Bill recalled that with the upcoming red pine removal, there would likely be an opportunity for outreach. He overheard conversation about it in the barber shop and said people did not seem well informed, so it seemed like the Commission could make things clearer to the public. Chair Von Plinsky agreed.

5) NH Association of Conservation Commissions Dues Request

Chair Von Plinsky referred to the request in the meeting packet from the NH Association of Conservation Commissions for \$950.00 in annual dues.

A motion by Mr. Therriault for the Conservation Commission to approve paying \$950.00 in annual dues to the NH Association of Conservation Commissions was duly seconded by Mr. Bill.

Mr. Bill asked if that was the amount the Commission typically paid and Chair Von Plinsky thought it was approximately the same as previous years. Mr. Bill thought it would be a large part of the Commission's budget and Mr. Haynes asked how it would affect the budget. Ms. Brunner said the full \$2,000 budget was unspent for July 31, 2024–June 30, 2025. She recalled that in the prior year, the Commission paid for four Commissioners to go to the NH Association of Conservation Commissions' Annual Conference and no Commissioners had requested that this year, so those funds remained. Additionally, Mr. Haynes said that the Commission had not paid an honorarium for any of the Goose Pond walks this year. Councilor Williams said he would consider how the budget could be used for spring planting replacements for invasive species.

The motion for the Conservation Commission to approve paying \$950.00 in annual dues to the NH Association of Conservation Commissions carried unanimously.

6) Membership Update

Chair Von Plinsky said he would be meeting with Mayor Kahn to talk about full vs. alternate positions for the new Commissioners. He explained that everyone's position at the table is equal, and it is a matter of dealing with Rules. Alternate members participate as freely as any regular member but might not be assigned by the Chair as voting members at every meeting. Individuals are only allowed two full terms as regular members. Vice Chair Madison volunteered to be Chair in 2025 until the end of his term and to lead someone who is nominated as Vice Chair while they learn in advance of potentially taking the role of Chair after that. A Commissioner must be a regular member, not an alternate, to be Chair or Vice Chair, which was part of why Chair Von Plinsky wanted to meet with the Mayor to discuss membership.

7) **Adoption of 2025 Meeting Schedule**

Given that Vice Chair Madison would potentially be nominated as Chair in 2025, discussion ensued about his ability to arrive at meetings before 5:00 PM. The Commission reviewed a proposed 2025 meeting schedule in the agenda packet that showed the normal third Monday of the month (except in January and February, when they are the third Tuesdays due to holidays) at 5:00 PM instead of the historic Commission meeting time of 4:30 PM.

A motion by Vice Chair Madison to approve the 2025 meeting schedule was duly seconded by Mr. Walker. The motion carried unanimously.

8) **New or Other Business**

Mr. Bill raised questions about the Commission's site visit and Advice & Comment on a potential Cottage Court Development & Surface Water Conditional Use Permit at 0 Court Street (TMP #228-016-000) during the November 2024 Commission meeting. He recalled discussion about the developers planning for the 2-, 10-, and 50-year recurrence intervals, except for the wetland crossing, which was 100-year. So, he asked for clarity about what they were planning, what the Commission's role was, and how to reconcile the different numbers. Chair Von Plinsky said that the discussion in November was very informal and not a part of the regulatory process. When the applicant comes back during the regulatory process, the Commission would have the opportunity to ask those questions specifically, which he encouraged. Unfortunately, he said the Commission did not have those answers at this time.

Ms. Brunner explained that at this time, the City of Keene's local regulations require that any stormwater system be designed for a 25-year storm, or a 50-year storm on a steep slope. The State of NH permits have different requirements. For example, an Alteration of Terrain Permit for over 100,000 square feet of impact would be for a 100-year storm. She thought the stream crossing the developer referred to with the box culvert was what would have to be constructed for a 100-year storm and the stormwater management systems for the actual development (outside of the wetland area) would be designed for a 25-year storm.

Mr. Bergman asked if the parameters for the categories of 25-, 50-, and 100-year storms were changing. Ms. Brunner said yes, Cornell University updates the storm categories based on climate modeling data and Keene uses their definition for a 25-year storm, and 50-year for impacts to steep slopes. Mr. Bergman asked if that category refers to culverts or other kinds of infrastructure like bridges. Ms. Brunner said that the local regulation focuses more on the amount of runoff expected. Keene requires that the developer use HydroCAD Stormwater Modeling, which uses inputs to determine the amount of runoff pre- and post-development to ensure that the "post" figure is not higher. Mr. Bergman said the City engineers and the contractors would have to reach an agreement about those inputs and Ms. Brunner said yes, one of the inputs is based on a 25-year rainfall event. She added that if Commissioners were concerned about this and thought the standard should be increased to a 50-year storm, for example, that would be something good to contribute through the Master Planning process.

As someone who used to create stormwater reports, Mr. Flaherty explained that the HydroCAD model Ms. Brunner referenced inputs basic numbers from the Cornell University study into formulas for various things like catch basins or culverts. Mr. Flaherty said you could always over design for a 100-year storm with a sufficient budget; it is safe.

Mr. Bill referenced the discussion of red pine scale during the November 2024 Commission meeting and the mention by staff of a machine that would eradicate the tree roots after three rows of red pines are proposed to be removed in Wheelock Park. He thought it would really disrupt the soils. Ms. Clark thought they had talked about stump grinders. Mr. Bill thought that for an area of hundreds of trees, it would be a significant impact to the soil. So, he thought the Commission should have better understanding and input. He cited an example of less root disturbance, by cutting the trunk at the ground level and letting it decay naturally into the soil. Mr. Bergman recalled the Director of Parks & Recreation, Ms. Fisk-Hennessey, also mentioning replacing the red pines with broad leaf trees as soon after as possible. Mr. Bill understood but explained that soils are arranged in horizons and take a lot of time to develop, so treating it like a farm would be disruptive. Ms. Clark said the machine acts like extracting a tooth, for example, just below the ground level—Mr. Bill thought six inches had been mentioned—and then it is covered with topsoil. Ms. Clark said the roots are usually actually still there anchoring the soil and feeding microbes. Mr. Milliken said they usually only go to stump size. He added that he went to look at a few of the red pine locations, like the one near the schools on Maple Avenue, and he thought there were plenty of oak trees growing there to hopefully take over afterward. Ms. Clark agreed.

This was Chair Von Plinsky's last meeting on the Commission and he thanked his colleagues for electing him as Chair and he thanked former chairs, Ms. Clark and Mr. Haynes, for guiding him. If needed, he would be willing to serve as an alternate in the future. Mr. Haynes led the Commission in thanking Chair Von Plinsky and Ms. Clark for their service. Mr. Bergman would be transitioning from a regular to an alternate member in 2025.

9) **Adjourn – Next Meeting Date: Tuesday, January 16, 2025 at 5:00 PM**

There being no further business, Chair Von Plinsky adjourned the meeting at 5:21 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katrinya Kibler, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner