

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, January 19, 2021

4:30 PM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Chair
Eloise Clark, Vice Chair
Councilor Bobby Williams
Ken Bergman
Art Walker
Andrew Madison
Brian Reilly, Alternate (Non-Voting)
John Therriault, Alternate (Voting)

Staff Present:

Rhett Lamb, Community Development
Director/Assistant City Manager
Andy Bohannon, Director of Parks,
Recreation & Facilities
Corinne Marcou, Administrative Assistant

Members Not Present:

Thomas Haynes, Alternate

1) Call to Order

Chair Von Plinsky called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM and read the Executive Order authorizing a remote meeting: Emergency Order #12, issued by the Governor of the State of New Hampshire pursuant to Executive Order #2020-04. Pursuant to this order, members present stated their locations and whether calling alone. Steven Bill, Alternate, was participating in this meeting as a member of the public having not yet sworn his oath.

2) Vote for Chair and Vice Chair 2021

Mr. Walker nominated Sparky Von Plinsky to continue serving as Chairman of the Conservation Commission for the 2021 calendar year, which Councilor Williams seconded, and the nomination passed with a unanimous roll call vote in favor

Chair Von Plinsky nominated Eloise Clark to continue serving as the Vice Chair of the Conservation Commission for the 2021 calendar year, which Mr. Therriault seconded, and the nomination passed with a unanimous roll call vote in favor.

3) Approval of Meeting Minutes – December 21, 2020

Vice Chair Clark moved to approve the minutes of December 21, 2020, which Mr. Walker seconded, and the motion passed with a unanimous roll call vote in favor.

4) Communication and Notifications

a. NHACC Donation Request – December 1, 2020

Mr. Lamb explained that no actual request for donation was made at this time but rather this was a notice that they would begin issuing requests for donations soon; the Commission usually received formal donation requests during the spring. The Chairman stated his preference to wait to make the donation until spring regardless, particularly to ensure sufficient funds would be available in case individuals want to be sponsored to attend the NH Invasives Academy, as discussed at the previous meeting.

Vice Chair Clark noted that Mr. Lamb should have received a communication from the Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee sharing their annual report. Mr. Lamb would share the report with the Commission.

5) Informational

a. Subcommittee Reports

i. *Outreach Subcommittee*

Vice Chair Clark recalled that she had been sending "Nature Nuggets" to Ms. Marcou regularly for posting on the City website and Community Development Department social media. Mr. Bohannon noted that he shares those posts as well to the Parks and Recreation social media and stated that they are among their most popular.

ii. *ARM Fund Subcommittee*

Chair Von Plinsky and Mr. Bergman hoped to meet and discuss ideas before the February meeting. Mr. Lamb recalled discussion at the previous meeting about seeking ARM Funds for Japanese knotweed management on the west bank of Beaver Brook across from the Russell Park redesign, which the Chairman would keep in mind during subcommittee discussions.

6) Discussion Items

a. Continued Discussion – Invasive Species Management

Mr. Bohannon shared that he was contacted by an individual experienced in forestry and invasives management who moved to Keene recently from the Midwest and he shared information about this Commission's focus on invasives as well as that of the Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board (ARPAB). This individual also registered for the NH Invasives Academy and had submitted an application to join either this Commission or the ARPAB as an alternate member. Chair Von Plinsky offered his contact information and willingness to share information about this Commission with the individual should Mr. Bohannon want to share it. Mr. Bohannon

stated that he has agendized invasives and pollinators for the ARPAB's foreseeable meetings. A member of his Staff is also interested in attending the NH Invasives Academy should the Commission have funds for sponsorship.

The Chairman stated that he reviewed the Russell Park Master Plan, which he said looked like a great opportunity for ARM funding. He asked when the next round of ARM funding would be. Mr. Lamb thought that applications were solicited typically when funds are available and assigned to different regions. The Chairman had spoken with someone from the NH Department of Environmental Services on this matter and would inquire again. Vice Chair Clark stated that when inquiring about the cemetery project last year she was informed that there is a set schedule for proposals beginning in early spring, and so now would be the time to begin acting.

Mr. Bergman stated that he also reviewed the Master Plan for Russell Park, which cited a study prepared by Jeff Littleton titled Natural Resource Inventory of Stream Riparian Buffers – Conservation and Priority Plan for Keene, NH, and Mr. Bergman thought that plan might be useful for the Commission to review. Mr. Lamb stated that the study was prepared during 2008-2010 approximately, that it was included as background research for the Russell Park project, and that some of Mr. Littleton's ideas were included in the Russell Park Master Plan. Mr. Lamb would make it available to the Commission. Mr. Bohannon added that an aforementioned grant application for Russell Park – Soak Up the Rain NH, provided through the Water Management Bureau – had no funding available at this time.

Councilor Williams recalled a discussion at the December 2020 meeting about the Garlic Mustard Challenge and suggested that now would be the time to establish an event. Following questions on when the plant blooms most commonly, Vice Chair Clark confirmed that garlic mustard does not bloom until the end of April or into May. The Chairman and Mr. Lamb would agendize the matter as a priority item for the February meeting to establish a foundational plan. Councilor Williams would reach out to the NH Garlic Mustard Challenge coordinator for ideas.

b. Continued Discussion – Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Plan

Mr. Lamb continued the discussion that began at the previous meeting about establishing a stewardship committee for the Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Plan. He recalled that the Commission agreed that the stewardship committee should report directly to City Council and include representatives from the Conservation Commission. He and Mr. Bohannon sought further input from the Commission at this meeting on the committee's make-up and charge – a two/three sentence statement of the committee's priorities and objectives so Council knows what they are assigning people to do. To begin, Mr. Lamb shared an email from Mr. Haynes that proposed a main group of seven committee members with the following stakeholders:

1. Representative from Parks & Recreation – possibly Mr. Bohannon
2. Representative from Conservation Commission to perhaps act as the Chair
3. Ecologist/Biologist – Ideas include Mr. Littleton and Mr. Bergman

4. Forester – perhaps from the Forest Preservation Society, which holds the property's easements.
5. Representative from the mountain biking community
6. An abutter to the property
7. Outreach coordinator – someone to promote and oversee educational opportunities
 - a. If members of the Conservation Commission wanted Mr. Haynes to serve on the stewardship committee, he felt he would fit best in this role.

Mr. Haynes' email concluded mentioning that he liked the Chairman's idea to have openings on the committee for interested Antioch and Keene State College (KSC) students, providing them an opportunity for hands-on learning. He suggested that a member of the Antioch Bird Club could help potentially with bird surveys or studies. Mr. Lamb thought that Mr. Haynes' suggestions were a great start and built well upon the broader stakeholder ideas discussed in December 2020.

The Chairman recalled the goal for this meeting to establish recommendations on the stewardship committee's proposed membership so that Mr. Lamb and Mr. Bohannon could draft a charge for the committee, which the Commission to vote on in February and forward to Council. He thought that having one or two Conservation Commission representatives would be feasible due to the passion within this group, he thought that it would be easy to recruit a member of the New England Mountain Bike Association (NEMBA) as well as an abutting property owner, recalling that City Councilor Kate Bosley is an abutter. The Chairman thought it logical to have staff from the Parks & Recreation Department attend the meetings but not be a member of the committee. He said he and Mr. Lamb agreed this would be more appropriate than staff being a voting member. He was hesitant to have so strong a focus on ecologists/biologists/foresters should it not be easy to recruit these busy professionals. Finally, the Chairman stated support for including students.

Vice Chair Clark recalled that a local forester, Tad Lacey, served on the original committee that developed the Stewardship Plan and stated that there are professionals available in the area.

Consensus was reached on Mr. Haynes' proposed composition of the stewardship committee and so Mr. Lamb and Mr. Bohannon would draft a charge and motion to pass this recommendation along to Council. The Chairman would contact KSC and Antioch to gauge interest from students and professors.

Mr. Bill noticed that a Keene City Planner served on the original stewardship plan committee and asked if that would be an important role to include. Mr. Lamb thought that City Staff can attend to advise the committee and recommended against staff listed in the membership. Mr. Bill questioned whether a member of a local hiking group should be included if NEMBA would be represented. The Chairman was unaware of a local hiking group as organized as NEMBA. Mr. Lamb thought it was a good point given that there are multiple trail uses in the greater Goose

Pond Forest and potential for conflict exists, for which it would be prudent to create balance on the stewardship committee if possible. The Chairman suggested including a few open slots on the committee for general public users of the park.

Regarding the inclusion of students, Mr. Bergman stated that Antioch students are at the graduate level, usually older, and more mature and experienced in topics related to this Stewardship Plan. Though he said it could be possible to find highly motivated KSC undergraduate students.

c. Continued Discussion – Bee City Designation

Mr. Therriault explained that following the previous meeting, he worked with Mr. Lamb to draft a resolution that included necessary details about Keene and the standard language of Bee City USA proclamations nationwide that the organizing agency – The Xerces Society – seeks for continuity. Mr. Therriault submitted the draft resolution to the Xerces Society and received approval. Next, the resolution would be presented to City Council for approval, at which time Mr. Therriault would submit the requisite fee to the Xerces Society. Mr. Lamb thought the resolution would be presented to Council at their February 7 meeting.

7) New or Other Business

Vice Chair Clark reminded all that the NH Invasives Academy would begin March 4 and run through April 8 on Thursdays from 4:00 PM-5:30 PM. Mr. Lamb would review the budget to determine how many individuals could have their \$35 registration fees sponsored by the Conservation Commission; he would follow-up via email.

Mr. Bergman asked whether the program is interactive. Councilor Williams recalled attending the Academy previously, said it was interactive, and that he thought there would be good discussions still despite limitations of a virtual format.

The Chairman stated his intention to attend. Vice Chair Clark offered to lead a more hands-on tour of local invasives after the classes conclude to supplement interactivity that might be lacking with a virtual format.

8) Adjournment – Next Meeting Date: TUESDAY, February 16, 2021

There being no further business, Chair Von Plinsky adjourned the meeting at 5:18 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker
January 25, 2020

Edits submitted by the Community Development Department.