

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, June 21, 2021

4:30 PM

Hybrid Meeting
Council Chambers/via Zoom

Members Present:

Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Chair
Eloise Clark, Vice Chair (via Zoom)
Councilor Robert Williams
Councilor Andrew Madison
Art Walker
Ken Bergman (via Zoom)
Thomas Haynes, Alternate (Voting)
Brian Reilly, Alternate (Voting)
John Therriault, Alternate (Voting)

Staff Present:

Rhett Lamb, Community Development
Director/Assistant City Manager

Members Not Present:

Steven Bill, Alternate

1) Call to Order

Chair Von Plinsky called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM. Vice Chair Clark and Mr. Bergman both participated remotely for personal reasons.

2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – May 17, 2021

Revisions: Line 62, change, “another Goose Pond through the Seasons walk,” to, “a Tap to Toilet event.” Change the meeting adjournment to 5:34 PM.

Mr. Walker moved to approve the minutes of May 17, 2021, as amended, which Mr. Haynes seconded, and the motion carried with a unanimous roll call vote in favor.

3) Informational

A) Subcommittee Reports

i) *Outreach Subcommittee*

Mr. Haynes reported progress on the Goose Pond through the Seasons walks, with Steve Bill slated for a fall walk. Additionally, Mr. Haynes spoke to Councilor Steve Hooper about a

potential walk in August on Goose Pond through the lens of a camera; further details to be determined. The Tap to Toilet event still pends for this fall. Mr. Haynes cited an email that Commissioners received about an invasive species walks at the Ashuelot River Park on Monday, June 28 at 6:00 PM. Vice Chair Clark reported that she would now send Nature Nuggets to Ms. Marcou and Mr. Bohannon regularly on the 1st and 15th of each month. The Chairman said he shared Nature Nuggets that spread popularly among a group of California friends.

ii) *ARM Fund Subcommittee – Non-Public Session*

The Chairman canceled the non-public session at this time. Rather, he shared some remarks that he asked the Commission to consider for a future non-public session. Briefly, he said he spoke with Mr. Bergman and Mr. Haynes and would like the rest of the Commission to consider ways to spur the Commission's land conservation efforts and work toward a plan to conserve important parcels. He was unsure the best way to go about such a plan and would rely on Commissioners in this effort. More soon.

Mr. Bergman said he sent the Chairman and Mr. Lamb two links, one on the NH Municipal Association and another on University of NH Extension Service, that the Chairman can share with the Commission if useful.

4) Discussion Items

A) NH DOT Roadway Rehabilitation Project No. 43057 Route 9

Mr. Lamb recalled discussing this letter from NH Department of Transportation (DOT) at the last meeting that seeks input from the Commission on road resurfacing from the western end of Route 9 in Keene to the roundabout at Base Hill Road. The letter indicated minor shoulder work, adjustments to culverts, and possible associated crossings. NH DOT contacts impacted towns as a standard process. This communication was sent to this Commission, the Heritage Commission, the Historic District Commission, and general Staff to seek local awareness on topics and resources. The Conservation Commission could comment via letter before the project design goes to bid in October.

Mr. Therriault requested that any disturbances to the roadsides or verges be replanted with a native wildflower mix instead of grasses. The Chairman wanted that to be a standard request moving forward and wondered if there was one specific seed mix to reference. Mr. Therriault said he and the Vice Chair discussed this, and several companies sell a New England regional (Pennsylvania to Maine) pollinator mix of more than 20 annuals and perennials. Some seeds would be wasted no matter what, but the seeds most appropriate to this zone would establish. He suggested recommending a New England native wildflower mix.

Mr. Bergman wondered if those wildflower mixes would stabilize slopes against erosion as effectively as grasses might. Mr. Therriault acknowledged that this issue was worth considering and stated that was something NH DOT would have to evaluate; he anticipated that some flowers

would stabilize certain slopes and on the steepest slopes DOT would have to decide whether to use better stabilizers. With that in mind, Mr. Bergman suggested that the recommendation should state to use the wildflowers wherever possible given slope considerations. Mr. Reilly noted that the segment of RT-9 to Sullivan was beginning to grow in following road work the last two years, and he said it appeared to be a mix of grasses and wildflowers on steep slopes.

Based on Commission consensus, Mr. Lamb was prepared to draft a letter to NH DOT on the Commission's behalf for the Chairman to sign.

Councilor Williams said that he biked up the hill on RT-9 and he wants more attention paid to making the road edges safer for bikes; although he does not think that RT-9 should be recommended for biking, if someone found themselves there on a bike, he wanted it to be safe. While he was there, he did not see many roadside invasive species but saw many issues where the woods meet the grass, where there are significant vines and particularly honeysuckle, and the Commission should consider the appropriate treatments for those invasives. The Chairman did not think this project would expand far past the roadside so he was unsure if there could be recommendations for those areas.

B) Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Committee

The Chairman began referring to this as the Goose Pond Stewardship Committee, for short. Staff had drawn-up a motion to establish this Subcommittee.

Mr. Therriault moved to establish a Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Committee with the charge to advise the Conservation Commission regarding implementation of the 2019 Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Plan including stewardship of natural resources, wildlife habitat, forest ecology, and promotion of recreation and education opportunities, and to appoint the following Conservation Commission members: Thomas Haynes as Chair, Art Walker, and Steven Bill. Councilor Madison seconded the motion.

The Subcommittee would return with additional recommendations to include other members as they are recruited. Mr. Reilly wondered if the motion language should state that additional members would be added at the Commission's discretion. The Chairman confirmed that the motion language was standard practice and Mr. Reilly was pleased.

The motion to establish the Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Subcommittee passed with a unanimous roll call vote in favor.

The Chairman said he was excited to see this move forward. Mr. Lamb said that Mr. Haynes had done his homework, contacted the New England Mountain Biking Association, and received the name of an ideal individual. The Subcommittee hopes to move quickly bringing other membership to the Commission. Any Commissioners with suggestions should contact Mr. Lamb and Mr. Haynes. Mr. Haynes was also working with Mr. Bohannon to find a community trails

person who is engaged actively with the pond. The Chairman said it was important to remember that this is a public Subcommittee and if necessary, the net could be cast wider to invite broad participation for a more successful project, even if individuals do not meet the specific outlined roles. Councilor Williams invited members of the public watching the meeting at home.

The next Subcommittee meeting is scheduled for Thursday July 8 at 8:30 AM at City Hall, when the group will start deciding their meeting schedule, consider other members, and discuss acting on other recommendations outlined in the Stewardship Plan. The Chairman personally thanked Mr. Haynes, Mr. Walker, and Mr. Bill for taking-on this large project that is a substantial part of the Conservation Commission's work in recent years.

Mr. Bergman wondered if the Commission could receive a sense of what steps in the plan had begun moving forward already or when earliest steps mentioned in the plan, like boundary marking, are anticipated to begin. Mr. Lamb had not spoken with Mr. Bohannon recently but there was not schedule of priorities that Mr. Lamb was aware of. Mr. Bohannon would be working directly with the Subcommittee, so more details soon.

C) Conservation Commission Speaking Events

Councilor Madison said he spoke with prospective speakers about a potential late July event, and most are busy. He thought it would be better to make this a winter series (November—March) of speaking events, when most participants would be tempted to come inside for a talk. This provides more time to plan, schedule speakers, and find the resources needed. Mr. Haynes suggested a talk called What's the Buzz? on pollinators and Councilor Madison agreed that witty titles entice participants. All Commissioners agreed this was a good plan to keep the community engaged with Commission activities year-round.

D) Multiyear Pollinator Census Results for Cheshire County

Mr. Therriault had not received results yet from Moosewood Ecological and asked that this be continued on next month's agenda. Mr. Walker asked how bee censuses are conducted. Mr. Therriault said that usually a piece of land is monitored routinely for pollinators and that provides an idea of population health in that particular area.

E) Powers, Duties, and Guidelines/Mission Statement

Mr. Lamb said that the correction was made to the website where the Commission powers and duties are listed to enact language that the Commission amended a few years ago in Chapter Two of the City Code. Therefore, the language Mr. Bergman was concerned with about promoting the development of natural resources was rectified.

5) New or Other Business

Mr. Therriault reserved some flats of wild lupin seedlings, which is the only host flower for the endangered Karner blue butterfly. He plans to plant some on his property and at the verges of the pine woods at the Keene Country Club. If there are other places the Commission is responsible for that would be good areas, he would have extra for planting late September/early October. The best places to plant are at verges of pine forests; his research spoke of pines in general and did not indicate particular species. The Chairman suggested near the Jonathan Daniels School parking lot between the grass and Dinsmore Woods pines. Mr. Therriault said the soils must just be reasonably fertile. Pine needles acidify soil when they fall, and the lupins like acidic soils. Mr. Reilly referenced the Karner blue butterfly in association with the pine barrens in Concord, NH, where the species is said to be thriving well.

Vice Chair Clark reminded the Commission that it had not paid its annual dues to the NH Association on Conservation Commissions (NHACC) and needed to decide at this meeting before remaining money in the Commission budget was lost at the end of the fiscal year on June 30. Mr. Lamb checked and confirmed that there was at least \$700 remaining in the Commission budget and if unspent, it would not roll over to the next fiscal year beginning on July 1, when the Commission receives its annual \$1,500. The Chairman wanted to use those funds before they were lost and although he did take seriously that those are taxpayer dollars, he thought the NHACC was doing important work in Concord, NH, on behalf of the Commission.

Vice Chair Clark moved to donate no more than the remainder of the Conservation Commission's Fiscal Year 2020-2021 budget to the NH Association of Conservation Commission's dues before June 30, 2021. Mr. Therriault seconded the motion, which passed with a unanimous roll call vote in favor.

Regarding the Karner blue butterfly, Mr. Bergman said that there is a large pine bush near the Albany, NY, airport where the endangered pollinator also survives. He also said that Harvard University the butterfly specimens collected by the famous Russian author and lepidopterist, Vladimir Nabokov, who discovered the Albany population and its dependence on the lupine while communing between his research position at the Harvard Museum of Natural History and his job teaching literature at SUNY Albany.

Mr. Lamb said that the Governor's Emergency Order allowing remote meetings was rescinded but there is allowance for remote participation under NH RSA 91-A for good cause that must be approved by the Commission. There was also still the public option to participate via Zoom, but he was unsure how long that would last as well. The Chairman said it made sense to keep meetings in person but thought there was no good reason to silence a helpful voice due to remote participation.

Regarding the winter speaker series, Mr. Haynes thought it would be nice to offer honorariums to bring in quality speakers but said that would be difficult with the Commission's \$1,500 budget. He wondered if there was a City process to request a higher budget for these educational opportunities for the City. Mr. Lamb said he would research the origin of the budget limit. The

Council had just approved the Fiscal Year 2021-2022 budget and so the Commission could request an increase from the City Council next year.

6) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Von Plinsky adjourned the meeting at 5:16 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katrnya Kibler, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Rhett Lamb, Community Development Director/ACM