

**City of Keene**  
**New Hampshire**

**CONSERVATION COMMISSION**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Monday, December 20, 2021**

**4:30 PM**

**Council Chambers,  
City Hall**

**Members Present:**

Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Chair  
Eloise Clark, Vice Chair  
Councilor Robert Williams  
Art Walker  
Thomas Haynes, Alternate

**Staff Present:**

Corinne Marcou, Administrative Assistant  
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner  
Don Lussier, City Engineer  
Andy Bohannon, Director of Parks,  
Recreation & Facilities

**Members Not Present:**

Councilor Andrew Madison  
Ken Bergman  
Brian Reilly, Alternate  
Steven Bill, Alternate  
John Therriault, Alternate

**1) Call to Order**

Chair Von Plinsky called the meeting to order at 4:33 PM.

**2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – November 15, 2021**

Correction: line 323, change “each to pull” to “easy to pull.”

A motion by Vice Chair Clark to adopt the November 15, 2021 minutes as amended was duly seconded by Mr. Walker and the motion passed unanimously.

**3) Application: Eversource – North Keene Substation, 115 Park Ave.**

Chair Von Plinsky welcomed Jeremy Belanger, Senior Engineer for TFMoran, which is the consulting firm for the Eversource North Keene Substation project. This is a request for a Conditional Use Permit through the Planning Board for disturbance to the Surface Water Protection District (SWPD) buffer.

Mr. Belanger provided background on the project. This project is for lot 233-2, located at 115 Park Avenue, with Wheelock Park to the south and NH RT-12 to the north. The parcel itself is

15.3 acres and is Zoned as Conservation. The SWPD constitutes the western portion of the lot due to the location of Tenant Swamp, which is partially located on the west side of the property. This request is for disturbances equating to 16,050 square feet to the City's 75-foot SWPD buffer for reconstruction of a gravel access driveway. There are two components of the gravel driveway that would be placed. The first portion is located within the property and the second portion is within the RT-12 right-of-way (ROW). NH Department of Transportation (DOT) does not prefer a permanent access off RT-12 for things such as standard maintenance, operation, and access to the substation, which would continue to be through the Wheelock Park driveway around the baseball field with gated access that comes into the south side of the site.

Mr. Belanger continued explaining why the driveway and impacts are needed. As well as having the substation on this parcel, there is an existing utility corridor that crosses RT-12 and bisects the site. He said there had been ongoing line work there recently and there is a temporary gravel driveway from RT-12 to the line for oversized vehicles and equipment, preventing large construction vehicles from traversing Wheelock Park and the substation site to access the corridor. He said that this was the second temporary permit that DOT granted, the first was for the construction of the substation in 2014 and now there is one in place for the D-108 line construction. As a part of the substation, electrical improvements were needed that would require oversized equipment that would struggle to use Wheelock Park. Because the proposed driveway is located in the same general location as a prior gravel driveway when the substation was constructed, TFMoran felt it was a better design to create this driveway to permanent standard and to implement and install stormwater management areas to treat driveway runoff. The temporary driveway within the ROW would be removed upon completion of these improvements so that in the future, only this temporary access must be replaced for other work. Mr. Belanger concluded mentioning that Staff suggested using a conservation seed mix instead of a typical lawn mix, which TFMoran supported; they included specifications for the NE Conservation Wildlife Mix from NE Wetland Plants, Inc. as a suggestion.

Vice Chair Clark asked if they were installing a permanent driveway except for the short portion under RT-12. Mr. Belanger replied in the affirmative, stating that NH DOT does not allow permanent driveways in their controlled access ROWs with federal jurisdiction, which they equate with putting a driveway onto a highway. Therefore, a temporary permit was granted.

The Chairman said he was trying to understand the need for a permanent driveway, wondering why the whole thing could not be temporary. Mr. Belanger said that would make sense for a first-time occurrence, but this was the third time the parcel had come forward because Wheelock Park could be used for certain equipment. There are different standards for temporary and permanent designs, with the latter having to be built to DOT specifications with a compacted gravel surface that drains toward the proposed stormwater management area outside the buffer. Instead of re-disturbing these areas each time and creating more sediment and erosion, the idea was a permanent structure with surface water management and treatment. There is already gravel spanning almost the entire length within the buffer with no real grading or treatment. Therefore, they designed this to pitch stormwater away from the wetlands and provide treatment per an

Alteration of Terrain permit and City standards. Thus, because additional work is anticipated in this area of the State, there would not be increased impacts each time new work is needed. The proposed work and impacts are fully within the substation yard constructed in 2014, there is no proposed clearing of trees because all work is within the existing utility ROW, which per National Electric Safety Commission standards does not allow overhead trees in these areas.

Chair Von Plinsky visited the site and asked how the road surface would be different from the temporary to permanent areas, besides changes like grading. Mr. Belanger replied that currently at the entrance, it is a riprap type stone, followed by a compacted sandy soil natural material that is prone to erosion, and there is some gravel in the temporary driveway area. The elevation will match the existing grade but instead of everything flattened, they pitched it toward the stormwater management area. They would be replacing a combination of the gravel and compacted sand with compacted gravel that meets DOT standards. The Chairman continued asking whether the cut would balance the fill on this site. Mr. Belanger said the whole site was designed to be pretty even on cut/fill, with only a few hundred cubic yards of material that would be moved around from the excavation within the substation yard, but all that material is consistent and can be reused onsite. He showed the reconfiguration of the existing stormwater management system, which is a depressed area adjacent to the substation that would be filled from cuts elsewhere on site. The Chairman was glad to hear that fill would not be brought in that could transport invasive species. Mr. Belanger noted that the contractor is responsible for managing invasive species per State Standard 3800.

Vice Chair Clark asked for the definition of sediment fore bays. Mr. Belanger replied that a sediment fore bay is a pretreatment technique designed per Alteration of Terrain standards and the University of NH Stormwater Management Manual. These three fore bays on site would be two-foot-deep holes that the stormwater is directed into via a concentrated flow, where the water sits, and sediment settles out before dispersing the clean water into the main cell of the stormwater management area. Forebays are cleaned twice annually per the Alteration of Terrain Permit; the permitholder, Eversource, must inspect best management practices biannually per an Inspection and Maintenance manual. TFMoran has a very good working relationship with Eversource, and TFMoran inspectors visit the site after snowmelt in the spring and leaf drop in the fall to inspect sediment in forebays and catch basins, checking for erosion and any other issues under the Alteration of Terrain permit, which continues in perpetuity.

Vice Chair Clark also asked Mr. Belanger to point out on the plans a 12–20-foot-high berm and its purpose. Mr. Belanger referred to the existing elevational change around the substation and showed where the existing berm is on the west side, which provides nice vegetation and a topographical barrier between the site and Tenant Swamp.

Vice Chair Clark continued stating her concern that the Zoning Board of Adjustment granted a Variance for 35-foot building height with more than 20% impervious surface. She asked where the impervious surface would be created. Mr. Belanger replied that the impervious surface is for the gravel driveway. He said the substation itself is 20% impervious of the lot and the ZBA

granted this permanent portion of the driveway to be placed. While the gravel is compacted, it is still counted as impervious to be conservative.

The Chairman was content that Mr. Belanger addressed the Conservation Commission's typical concern on native plantings.

Mr. Walker moved to not intervene on this Eversource project, which Councilor Williams seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

**4) Informational**

**A) Subcommittee Reports**

**i) *Outreach Subcommittee***

Mr. Haynes reported that the Subcommittee met and decided on some programs. On February 5, Vice Chair Clark, Matt Kelly, and Kim Bylancik will lead a Trees and Tracks seasonal walk at Goose Pond on forest ecology. Mr. Kelly is a newer Extension Service Forester for Cheshire County Conservation District and Mr. Haynes walked some Goose Pond trails with him recently. If there are enough participants, there could be multiple groups with the different leaders. This would be advertised in the standard Facebook, newspaper, etc. platforms.

Mr. Haynes said the group also discussed a trails maintenance workshop. Director of Parks, Recreation, & Facilities, Andy Bohannon, helped to contact Lew Shelley, a trails consultant and builder from Walpole, who seems interested in leading a basic workshop for volunteers on trail work in Goose Pond and perhaps elsewhere. The Chairman supported this idea to ensure well-intended members of the public are not damaging trails with maintenance.

Vice Chair Clark continues submitting Nature Nuggets.

Mr. Haynes was in contact with an Antioch University New England student, who is focusing on water and adult programs. Councilor Madison is in communication with the student due to his water expertise.

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

The group had not met.

**iii) *Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Committee***

Mr. Haynes reported that this Subcommittee also met and continued its work prioritizing trails for short-term maintenance. The group has walked the forest a few times, comparing current conditions with the Forest Stewardship Plan to determine if anything needs to be adjusted. The group discussed signage that would be most useful to visitors walking the trails immediately

around the pond. The Subcommittee is prioritizing various aspects of the forest for grant applications, such as signage and trails.

The Chairman noted the new covered bench area in the northeast corner of the pond. Mr. Bohannon said that was an aspect remaining from the dam project completed with funding from the start of the Stewardship Program for kiosks and benches, which took some time to install. The Chairman said the new kiosk is in an ideal location with a good view and he hopes it is used.

### **B) Invasive Species**

Councilor Williams had no updates as this program is out-of-season. In February, Councilor Williams hopes to begin meeting with individuals to create a schedule for different projects next summer, including the former Wheelock Park Campground area, where a disc golf course and/or a dog park are planned. He hoped to engage both groups in addressing the invasives there. Additionally, Councilor Williams said that he found a mature Norway maple that is sending out seedlings in Robin Hood Park on the right side of the amphitheater when looking over the City. Councilor Williams would send Mr. Bohannon the exact location. The Councilor said that removing that mother tree could prevent many problems.

### **C) Summit Road/Summit Ridge Drive Ponding**

Chair Von Plinsky welcomed the City Engineer, Don Lussier, who discussed the background and recent work the City completed to alleviate ponding at Summit Road/Summit Ridge Drive by restoring an existing manmade drainage system to functionality. The City Engineer said that when an adjacent field was used for agriculture, the past farmer installed a French drain at the lower end of the field, consisting of a clay tile pipe with a small swale above that functioned as an underdrain. When the Meadow Knoll neighborhood was developed at the top of the hill in the 1990s and Summit Ridge Drive was constructed, a culvert was placed under Summit Ridge Drive to drain into an adjacent stream. The present owner no longer farms and has no need for or interest in maintaining the drainage system, which thus fell into disrepair over time. The City began noticing this issue four years ago, when water from storm events began rising and pooling, which worsened over time. Three years ago, the City had to close Summit Ridge Drive for a few winter months because water pooled and froze in the roadway. Since, the City investigated the issue and found that the original drain system had failed and collapsed. It took the City 1.5-years working with the property owner to reach an agreement so the City could restore function of the drainage system. If the City were aware of the issue, they would have had Meadow Knolls fix the problem during development. The City has successfully restored the original drainage function.

Vice Chair Clark said that a neighbor saw a beaver removed and asked if that was a part of the procedure. The City Engineer said there was a dam on the opposite side of Summit Road and a beaver was removed to address the dam once the drain was repaired.

The Chairman asked if the City Engineer felt confident in the repairs and the City Engineer replied in the affirmative, stating that City crews rented an excavator to complete the work and were able to remove sufficient sediment to restore the open drainage ditch. They will have to return to the site in the spring because it is likely that seeds spread in the fall would not take. Mr. Haynes mentioned a pollinator friendly seed mix and the City Engineer would pass that information to the Highway Division.

5) **Discussion Items**

**A) Conservation Commission Speaking Events**

Tabled until next month.

**B) Multiyear Pollinator Census Results for Cheshire County**

Tabled until next month.

**C) Beaver Brook to Cemetery**

The Chairman said that a former commissioner, Denise Burchsted, approached Mr. Bohannon because one of her students found a wood turtle in the cemetery along Beaver Brook and was concerned about it. The wood turtle is not endangered but is worthy of note. This led to a conversation between the Chairman, Dr. Burchsted, Mr. Bohannon, and Councilor Jan Manwaring. The group of four walked the area and developed some ideas. They think they solved the wood turtle problem, which was ensuring a wood turtle could move safely from its place along the brook to its wood area. Mr. Bohannon would help enhance an existing corridor by mowing it less and widening the corridor. The group noticed many invasives in the area, including Japanese knotweed. They considered a way for the Commission to pool their expertise along that section of Beaver Brook and upstream, including invasives; starting upstream and working down to the finish line at Beaver Street, addressing knotweed and barberry in particular. Chair Von Plinsky said a good thing is that there are native species trying to thrive despite the knotweed, which means that expertly clearing the knotweed could help restore the natives over the course of several years. Additionally, there are frequent issues in the area with beaver. The group also discussed bringing in a beaver expert to deceive the beaver into not doing what they want, which benefits the beaver and stops their trapping every season. They discussed inviting a beaver expert to advise the Commission on long-term solutions to intermittent flooding in the cemetery, which would help invasives too. The Chairman thinks this is a great effort for the Commission.

Mr. Bohannon added that the group also discussed that the area is so rich, diverse, and strong that they might want to consider signage on the watershed in the area for education, including the salamander road closing and the mating seasons. They have found that on the road leading to the Beaver Brook Bridge, where they walked, that some species do not make it across during the summer because of the heat; there have been conversations to paint that road white to let it cool.

In general, Mr. Bohannon wondered if there were better ways to make that area an educational resource and engage citizens in the opportunity. It certainly serves Councilor Williams' invasives efforts and helps the City Staff to do less maintenance and create no mow zones. He said there were many possible wins. The Chairman said this was just to inform the Commission and he welcomed feedback on this blank canvass for public outreach, water management, and more.

Councilor Williams said he flew drones over that wetland, created some maps, and noted a massive knotweed area on the interior, invisible from any of the roads. Regarding the turtles, he noticed that in one of the channels with rocks along it, the rocks had been moved and he asked if the group did that. The Chairman said the group did not move anything. Mr. Bohannon was unsure and said the area they were discussing was closer to the corner of the property near Beaver Street. The de-channelization of a small stream that Councilor Williams saw was closer to North Lincoln Street; if it was intentional, he said it seemed a good idea. Chair Von Plinksy was pleasantly surprised by the good access from the stream to the woods for the turtles, but said it could be widened. One of the biggest problems that Dr. Burchsted educated the group on was mowing when turtles are crossing. This is the Colony family plot, which is accessed over the bridge, down the road to the left, then down the dirt road on the right, is a small area to keep not mowed and potentially adding small bushes. Councilor Williams would like to eliminate the buckthorn. The Chairman agreed the knotweed could require an additional funding source. Councilor Williams said there is the Ellis Harrison Park just north of that location with a particular knotweed problem cutting off the stream from the rest of the park; this could be a smaller project for practice.

The Chairman said he had a video to share with the Commission. Mr. Bohannon said a student approached the Recreation Division last fall for a capstone project on blue space; like green space parks and forests to soothe and relax, blue spaces are water and snow areas for a similar purpose. The student created a great video to explain, and she would lead six tours in the greater Keene area beginning in February targeted toward young adults and people 20–50 with their families, to get them experiencing new conservation areas like Robin Hood Park, Ashuelot River Park, Goose Pond, Granite Gorge, and others. Mr. Bohannon will share the video by next meeting and hopes people will attend the programs that are a terrific addition to the Parks and Recreation programming.

Vice Chair Clark said the University of NH Cooperative Extension has some excellent videos on turtle conservation and habitat restoration, including wood turtles, which are a species of special concern. She said Matt Tarr is a contact who said that wood turtles can walk through Japanese knotweed.

**6) New or Other Business**  
**A) 2022 Calendar**

Vice Chair Clark moved to approve the 2022 Conservation Commission calendar, which Mr. Haynes seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Vice Chair Clark noted that the Commission received a letter from the Society for the Protection of NH Forests, stating that there were no violations found to the conservation easements on Goose Pond and other City properties.

7) **Adjournment – Next Meeting date: Tuesday January 18, 2022**

There being no further business, Chair Von Plinsky adjourned the meeting at 5:33 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Katryna Kibler, Minute Taker  
December 27, 2021

Reviewed and edited by,  
Corinne Marcou, Administrative Assistant