

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, May 10, 2022

8:00 AM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Ruzzel Zullo, Vice Chair
Councilor Bettina Chadbourne
Stephen Hooper
Paul Bocko
Dian Mathews
Suzy Krautmann
Thomas Haynes, Alternate

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Director of Parks,
Recreation & Facilities

Members Not Present:

Arthur Winsor, Chair

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Vice Chair Zullo called the meeting to order at 8:01 AM.

2) Acceptance of April 12, 2022 Minutes

Mr. Haynes noted that on line 85 it should read “signs” and not “sings.”

Ms. Krautmann made a motion to accept the minutes of April 12, 2022 with the aforementioned correction. Mr. Hooper seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Mr. Bocko joined via Zoom at 8:05 am.

3) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon stated there is no change related to the finance report.

Ms. Mathews stated the Prairie Moon Nursery order does not come in until the end of May.

4) Report From Friends of Ashuelot River Park Arboretum

Ms. Mathews and Ms. Casey presented their Friends of the Arboretum at Ashuelot River Park PowerPoint. Ms. Mathews noted that the aforementioned name is now the correct legal name since they became a 501(c)3 organization.

Ms. Casey began by giving a description of Ashuelot River Park, mentioning that it is 157 acres total with unique features including a river, mill dam/waterfall, woods, and bike trail. She stated the Master Plan is their guiding document as they move forward to try and refresh and rejuvenate the park. She reviewed some of the recommendations as denser plantings via shrubs and perennials, improving the park entrance and views, removing invasive species and planting natives to increase biodiversity, improving drainage, and increasing inclusivity by making sure the park is accessible and attractive to populations such as lower income families, families with children and visitors. She then briefly went over the responsibilities of The Friends. Ms. Mathews added that they might be up to 13 master gardeners.

Ms. Casey summarized the key takeaways they received from their master gardener course to apply to their park projects. These included seeking advice from trusted sources and experts, knowing that soil health is foundational, favoring non-chemical methods to manage weeds and pests, promoting biodiversity and balance for climate resilience, and educating others. She mentioned some of the experts they are tapping into such as Michael Nerrie, Samuel Jaffe, Steven LaMonde, the Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee, and online resources like UNH Extension and Soak Up The Rain. She touched upon the fall migration bird walk that Ms. Mathews organized and stated structure is important for birds, noting that the tangle along the riverbank is attractive to birds if they can recreate it with natives. Ms. Casey also mentioned that it's appropriate to connect with the Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee because the watershed needs to be dealt with as far as invasive species.

Ms. Casey next explained soil health stating the soil sample testing was completed by UNH Extension and revealed that it was nutrient poor and has excess phosphorus. She explained that they will be fertilizing the beds based on the test results. Additionally, she stated leaving the leaves in the beds is a more sustainable practice and important for feeding the soil and creating a place for insects to over winter. She added that they are grateful Mr. Bohannon has been engaged and supportive of this practice implementation. Ms. Casey mentioned they will need to improve drainage in some areas and will depend on the City for that. She noted that the pollinator garden has plants that can actually feed the soil.

With regards to pest management, Ms. Casey stated they have had some good groups of people to help with the work such as hand weeding of beds. They have a lot of bittersweet and knotweed they are pulling out so they are being careful of how they dispose of that. She mentioned they are also tarping and using buckthorn baggies as mechanisms to kill the invasives.

Next, Ms. Casey covered native plants with regards to climate resilience. She explained that it's difficult to find quality native plants but they did find the Nasami Farm Nursery as a good source as well as Wild Seed Project. She stated fundraising efforts give them opportunities to obtain the

plants they need. Ms. Mathews stated they were awarded \$1,500 from the National Garden Club for plants, which means they have now fundraised \$2,500. Ms. Casey went on to state that volunteers are important for plantings as well as a reliable water source, and they are thankful they now have a spigot installed at the park.

Lastly, Ms. Casey mentioned future plans for the park. One of them is to add a rain garden and a picture garden. She mentioned the pergola as a potential picturesque spot. Education is another focus, especially the signage they have in the works to help teach the public about invasives and how to control and remove them. Organized “walk and talks,” bird walks, and coordinating with ARPAB and Antioch University are other ways she mentioned they can increase education. With regards to raising funds and awareness, she mentioned seed bombs, tabling at the Art in the Park event, starting an Ashuelot River Park blog, and being proactive about media coverage.

Ms. Mathews stated on Wednesday, April 27th they had a site visit to look at the rain garden site. They chose an area by Starbucks right where the gate is. She stated the parks crew will be moving the granite stiles that the chain goes on to the edge of the Starbucks parking lot, in an attempt to keep the plows from putting snow in the rain garden area during the winter months. She further explained that the rain garden comes off of the parking section and the land goes down; however, they will have to dig it out a little more so the rainwater will drain appropriately. They will need to leave a space to potentially add a small bridge over the wet area. She stated the area may need to be 7 or 8 feet wide and they were directed to create a berm using some of the bricks with no names on them. She noted this will be quite a big project.

Ms. Mathews reported that they had their first Saturday of the month workday and cut back knotweed on the far side of the bridge, filled up 6 giant garbage bags, and then double layered tarps over the area. The next step is for wood chips to be dumped over the tarps and that set up will sit for 4 or 5 years. She mentioned that they may extend to do the same practice with the bittersweet. Councilor Chadbourne asked how effective that would be on the bittersweet. Ms. Mathews stated they cut the invasives down as much as they can and the process will work on whatever they are tarping.

Ms. Mathews stated as soon as they get volunteers organized they will begin moving the shredded leaves into the beds. She explained that the leaves came from the grass in the fall. She added that they are working on adding perennials to hold the leaves through the winter because there are currently no perennials to do so.

Next, Ms. Mathews stated an ongoing issue is someone bringing poison into the shed. She stated she will be putting up a sign up that notes it’s illegal to use poison in NH.

Ms. Mathews reported that she has been talking to Elf to try and get an article on The Friends.

Ms. Mathews stated she plans to do a mapping of everything they’ve planted in the park, but will need to arrange for someone to specifically be doing that job when they are out at the park working.

Next, Ms. Mathews stated they are trying to get Mr. LaMonde back to do a spring bird walk. Mr. Bohannon suggested she follow the process Mr. Haynes uses for marketing and outreach, and to do it at least one month ahead of time.

Lastly, she stated the first day of summer is going to be a pollinator celebration at the park run by CCCD. They have the Harris Center, Keene Library, and other organizations coming in to do activities with kids and families. The Friends will discuss what they will be doing at their next meeting and she will report back.

Ms. Mathews mentioned piqued interest in the Cork Tree.

Mr. Hooper offered to help out taking pictures for The Friends to showcase their work.

Mr. Haynes suggested Ms. Mathews get in touch with John Therriault from the Conservation Commission with regards to pollinators and Bee City.

Councilor Chadbourne mentioned “No Mow May” as a mechanism to help pollinators and noted that the City Manager has agreed to start promoting the concept on the City website and Facebook page. Mr. Bohannon stated it would be a major culture shift, mentioning the fact that if he does not have the cemeteries mowed the public will not be happy. Ms. Mathews stated people have been trained to mow the grass and kill the bugs so it could make a difference if they begin promoting not mowing coupled with educating the public on the reasons why this practice is important. Mr. Bohannon agreed, stating it’s all about perception and they can identify sections that don’t need to be mowed and start there. He mentioned one large section in Monadnock View Cemetery that they used to contract out for someone to hay. He stated it would be a great place to have a giant pollinator garden in the almost 4 acres there, but it will take a lot of work and they aren’t quite equipped for that yet. Mr. Haynes stated if people do what they can to help promote the idea and help the pollinators that’s the general goal, for everyone to do a little bit.

There was short discussion about an invasive dandelion and Mr. Bohannon stated it hasn’t escalated enough to become a level of concern yet but has been identified at Drummer Hill.

Ms. Chadbourne asked about Asian jumping worms in the park and if there’s anything that can be done. Ms. Mathews stated they are in the park in the evergreen bed. She explained that they over winter as eggs and are too tiny to see, so you have to take them out of the ground when you see them and either dry them out or drown them. Ms. Casey stated they should confirm where they are in the park. Ms. Mathews mentioned that potted plants are spreading invasives and some states are now recommending that if you purchase plants from non-local nurseries that you put all the soil in the garbage and plant the bare root.

5) Park Discussion – Master Plan Implementation
A) Educational Signage

Mr. Bohannon stated the signage has been completed and is on order at Keene Signworx. The final piece of the project is the website that should be wrapped up within the next week. Their goal is to have the signs installed by June 21st for the pollinator event.

B) Book Walks

Mr. Bohannon stated they need to order the bases for the book walk and need to meet to decide exactly where to place it. The group decided to do a walk around on May 24th at 3:30 PM.

C) Public Art

Ms. Krautmann stated she hasn't heard an update recently but will reach out and report back. Ms. Mathews reminded everyone that they previously discussed putting the 3 grouped sculptures at the fence along West Street so you can see them from the sidewalk and the park. Mr. Bohannon stated that way they will be visible and have eyes on them in case of any damage.

6) New, Other Business

George Foskett asked if the sprinkler box could be repainted and Mr. Bohannon stated they will take care of that.

Mr. Bohannon asked if there were specifics on what The Friends could use their grant money on, wondering if it could assist with some of the signage. Ms. Mathews stated she will reach out to her grant contacts and report back. There was mention of getting a rain garden sign as well.

Mr. Haynes reported that on June 4th they are having a trail maintenance workshop with Lou Shelley and on May 21st they have a Spring Bird Walk with Steve LaMonde.

7) Adjourn – Next Meeting Tuesday, June 14, 2022 at 8:00 AM

There being no further business, Vice Chair Zullo adjourned the meeting at 8:58 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Nicole Cullinane, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Andy Bohannon, PRF Director

Additional edits by,
Katie Kibler, Clerk's Office