

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, June 20, 2022

3:30 PM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Chair
Councilor Andrew Madison, Vice Chair (Arrived Late)
Eloise Clark
Councilor Robert Williams (Left at 4:00 pm)
Art Walker
Ken Bergman
Thomas Haynes, Alternate
Steven Bill, Alternate (via Zoom)
John Therriault, Alternate

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner

Members Not Present:

Brian Reilly, Alternate

1) Call to Order

Chair Von Plinsky called the meeting to order at 3:30 PM. Roll call ensued, and Mr. Bill stated his location and whether anyone was present with him to participate via Zoom.

2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – May 16, 2022

Revision: Line 170 should read “14 inches in diameter,” not height.

A motion by Mr. Bergman to approve the May 16, 2022 minutes as amended was duly seconded by Mr. Walker and the motion carried unanimously.

3) Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Subcommittee Report

Mr. Haynes reported that the first trail maintenance workshop in May was fun and successful, cutting a new section of trail with a knowledgeable group of five. The next maintenance workshop is Saturday, July 9 and will focus on trail water issues. Mr. Walker said that the only downside was that more of the public was not involved. Mr. Haynes recalled issues with publicizing the last workshop and noted that he had just submitted a press release for the July workshop.

Mr. Haynes reported that he had not heard from Peter Poanessa about the signage. Thus, Mr. Haynes suggested moving forward reallocating that \$95.95 before the end of the fiscal year, which the Chairman said would work well.

Mr. Haynes continued, noting that the week before this meeting, the Subcommittee submitted a \$25,000 grant application to the State Recreation Trails Program for trails work in 2023 on the north side of Goose Pond. This work would include a new bridge and roughly 400 feet of rerouting the trail to that bridge. There is a 20% local match for the grant. The Chairman asked the location of this work. Mr. Haynes said that if one walked around the north side of the pond, they would reach a bridge that is currently muddy and full of roots on either side; the proposals is to reroute the trail north of that with a new bridge to let the current area go back to nature.

The Subcommittee honored former Director of Parks, Recreation & Facilities, Brian Mattson and named the trail the Mattson Trail. Additionally, the trails workshop leader, Lew Shelley, provided the Committee with a list of tools to work toward purchasing when needed. Mr. Haynes concluded that it was a good month for the Subcommittee.

4) NHDES Standard Dredge and Fill Wetlands Permit Application – Keene/Swanzey Compensatory Storage

Ms. Brunner reported that this was an application from NH Department of Transportation (DOT) to the NH Department of Environmental Services (DES) for a Dredge and Fill Wetlands Permit. The Conservation Commission has the opportunity to send comments and recommendations on this application to NH DES. Excerpts of the application were included in the agenda packet. This project would create compensatory flood storage for four NH DOT projects to offset floodplain impacts over time. The area in question is approximately 20 acres on the south side of Route 101, between Route 10 going south and Routes 9/12 going north. It is in an area owned by the State. Ms. Brunner shared two copies of the full permit application, and displayed maps on the screen to show the project area. She said she tabbed two sections of the application – one includes a description of species that may be impacted, including the northern long-eared bat (they will do an acoustic monitoring survey) and the monarch butterfly. This section notes that post-construction plantings include pollinator friendly species. The second section she tabbed provides some information about the history of the site, including its previous use as a corn field.

Councilor Williams reminded the Commission of a presentation they heard from two Keene State College students about the research on constructed versus pristine wetlands. He said the constructed wetland is similar to this proposed work. The students determined that the constructed wetland was not supporting nature, partly due to low oxygen levels in the water and being exposed to salt and silt from the highway. He said it seems hard to keep such a wetland healthy and asked what could be done proactively to keep this from being a low nature wetland. Mr. Bergman recommended that a riparian buffer be included to protect the constructed wetland from salt and siltation coming off the highway. The Chairman said it was unfortunate that

constructed wetlands aren't as healthy, and he was unsure it was possible to have a healthy version of the constructed wetland by Target. Councilor Williams suggested something like a solar powered aeration system that keeps water moving and oxygenated.

Mr. Therriault suggested regular monitoring at the location and the Commission discussed an ongoing partnership with Keene State College. He also stipulated that a pollinator forage mix be used and not a mix that attracts only one species. The group noted that the application refers to a planning list; however, that appendix was not provided.

The group discussed how water will get to the constructed wetlands. Ms. Clark reminded the group that the purpose of this application is to create a flood compensatory storage area, the focus is less on the ecosystem benefits of the wetland and more on flood storage. She said she attended some of the meetings with the State when they were trying to choose a location, and this particular location was chosen mostly because the State owns it.

Mr. Bill discussed the possibility that the project would be removing contaminated soils. He brought up the possibility of soil contaminants remaining on site, noting the site's history and nearby uses that could have generated contaminants, and recommended soil testing. If there are contaminants such as heavy metals, that may affect how soil removal is handled.

Vice Chair Madison made the following motion, which Mr. Bergman seconded. The Conservation Commission unanimously recommended to NH DES that the following items be considered as a part of the Standard Dredge and Fill Wetlands Permit Application for Keene/Swanzey Compensatory Storage: a solar-powered or other type of aeration system for wetland health, an ongoing monitoring partnership with Keene State College, a riparian buffer between the site and the highway, the use of pollinator-friendly foraging plants, and soil testing to confirm contaminants are not present on the site.

5) **Work Group Reports**
A) **Outreach**

The group had not met. The recent bird walk was well-attended, and all attendees seemed to have a good time. The Friends of Ashuelot River Park are hosting a Pollinator Palooza on June 21 from 1-3 pm.

Vice Chair Madison reported that he petitioned the City Council to amend their next fiscal year's budget to increase the Conservation Commission budget by \$500 for diverse education and outreach events. The Commission thanked the Vice Chair.

B) **ARM Fund**

The Chairman reported that he walked one of three properties with Jocelyn Duffy from the Conservation Land Stewardship Program as part of the LCIP easement monitoring, which he

called a good thorough walk near Goose Pond. The other parcels were near the Stone Arch Bridge on Court Street and near Production Avenue. If anyone would like to view the reports, they can request them from Andy Bohannon.

C) Invasive Species

Councilor Williams reminded the group of the Japanese knotweed pull after this meeting along the Beaver Brook channel near Woodland Cemetery. They are meeting by the bridge. The next event will be in July at the Airport, following-up on last year's invasive watercress pull to ensure the area stays clear. The Chairman said it is nice to spend a hot afternoon in the water.

6) Discussion Items

A) Conservation Commission Speaking Events

The Chairman said that now there is dedicated funding for such events, so the Commission should pursue opportunities. Vice Chair Madison said the problem is weather-dependent outdoor events, but outdoors is better for the pandemic. The Monadnock Food Co-op agreed to co-sponsor events and to let the Commission host events in its outdoor amphitheater for free. The Commission agreed that summer is a busy time for all, so they should pursue an event in September.

B) Airport Proposed Wildlife Control Fence

Mr. Bergman said this was pending an understanding of where things stand. He was unsure if there was money allocated in the next Fiscal Year's budget for this fence. Vice Chair Madison was unsure but would check; he noted that the Operating Budget was adopted by the City Council the week prior.

C) Budget Discussion

Chair Von Plinsky said that \$95.95 remained in the Commission budget to be spent before June 30. Mr. Therriault suggested using it to begin the Goose Pond trust, but the Commission agreed there was not time for that before the deadline. Mr. Walker suggested using it to buy a tool for Goose Pond, but Mr. Haynes hesitated to rush purchasing one item at that price. The Commission agreed to donate the funds to the Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee.

A motion by Chair Von Plinsky to donate \$95.95—or the remainder of the Conservation Commission budget for FY 2022—to the Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee was duly seconded by Vice Chair Madison. The motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Brunner reported that the Commission had received a thank you letter from ARLAC for the previous annual donation.

D) NHACC 2022 Membership

Ms. Brunner reported that an email was included in the meeting packet from the NH Association of Conservation Commissions, asking for updated Commissioner contact information. Staff provided that information for all members, including alternates, and everyone should begin receiving e-newsletters, which they could opt out of. For \$20, Commissioners could purchase a revised edition of the NHACC handbook.

E) Senate Bill 267 Upland Invasive Species Program

This bill was for \$150,000 under the offices of the Department of Agriculture, with the idea to create a State-level coordinator to work with towns on invasive species removal. Towns can request funds for invasive species projects and the coordinator would provide information on invasive species treatments. Councilor Williams would discuss this more next month.

Mr. Haynes asked about requesting funds for materials. The Chairman suggested that minor materials like trash bags are not an issue, but that for some areas in the City, expensive chemical treatments are required. Fortunately, the coordinator would be certified to apply herbicide.

Discussion ensued about the challenges of knotweed eradication. Chair Von Plinsky noted that this bill states that each municipality should designate a contact person for the invasive species coordinator, and asked who that would be for the City of Keene. Ms. Brunner said she would check with Ms. Dragon to see who she would like to designate for that role.

F) Debrief Site Walk of 0 Washington Street Ext. Property (TMP# 229-006-000)

Chair Von Plinsky reported that, following the last meeting where the group heard from Mr. Casadei regarding his company's plans for logging two properties, the Commission was invited to walk the site along Beaver Brook. The County forester, Matt Kelly, also participated at their invitation. The site visit went well and helped them understand what impact the logging would have. Mr. Casadei pointed out trees he would keep and trees he would remove. Mr. Bergman said he felt it was important to have another forester there, and said the group should continue to involve Mr. Kelly in these types of site visits.

Chair Von Plinsky said that there will also be a site visit of the northern parcel. Ms. Clark noted that the northern long-eared bat likes to roost in mature trees. It is one of only a few tree-roosting species of bats, and each roost only has 1-2 pups. She said the area should be checked for the presence of the northern long-eared bat prior to logging. Chair Von Plinsky noted that the State of NH doesn't have a lot of regulations for logging, so he isn't sure if that would be required.

7) **New or Other Business**

Ms. Brunner noted that Chris Casadei had reached out again about taking a walk with the Commission at Goose Pond now that he had a chance to read the Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Management Plan. The Commission agreed to refer Mr. Casadei to the Goose Pond Stewardship Subcommittee, which would involve the Director of Parks, Recreation & Facilities, Andy Bohannon.

8) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Von Plinsky adjourned the meeting at 4:32 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katrnya Kibler, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner