

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

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

**Monday, November 21, 2022**

**4:30 PM**

**Room 22,  
Recreation Center**

**Members Present:**

Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Chair  
Councilor Andrew Madison, Vice Chair  
Councilor Robert Williams  
Art Walker  
Ken Bergman  
Thomas Haynes, Alternate  
Brian Reilly, Alternate  
Steven Bill, Alternate (Arrived Late, via Zoom)

**Staff Present:**

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner

**Members Not Present:**

Eloise Clark  
John Therriault, Alternate

**1) Call to Order**

Chair Von Plinsky called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM.

**2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – October 17, 2022**

A motion by Vice Chair Madison to approve the minutes of October 17, 2022 was duly seconded by Mr. Walker and the motion carried unanimously.

**3) Report-Outs**

Chair Von Plinsky noted that these are all working groups, with the exception of the Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Subcommittee, meaning the meeting is announced publicly, minutes are prepared, and a quorum of members could be present.

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

Mr. Haynes reported that the Subcommittee met the previous week and had a good meeting about many things. They talked a lot about signage because individuals are doing unauthorized blazing in the park. Thus, the Director of Parks, Recreation, and Facilities, Andy Bohannon,

erected temporary signage asking people to not blaze and indicating that the Subcommittee was working on new trail signs soon. The Subcommittee hoped that a volunteer sign maker would be involved but that had not panned out. Thus, Mr. Haynes would be using his own tools to make the signs himself and they will be placed in the park as they are created. The signs would be nailed to trees in some instances and placed on posts in other instances. Mr. Bergman mentioned that this is not a good time of year for driving posts.

Mr. Haynes continued that the Subcommittee has tools at their disposal now. There are enough for two small working groups to be in the field when the weather improves. The Subcommittee talked about removing the kiosk at the north trailhead to reorient people to the new trailhead opened last summer. The Subcommittee would be doing field work on December 2 and possibly December 16 to take some trees down. If any Commissioners are available, help is needed to move some timber to build a walkway. The Subcommittee also discussed Park maps and settled on a design that would hopefully be available soon at the trailheads. The Subcommittee also discussed their scope of work for next spring/summer to keep moving forward.

## **B) Outreach**

Mr. Haynes reported that this work group also met last week. They were unsure at the last meeting whether there would be a fall “Goose Pond Through the Seasons” walk, but just after that meeting, Jeff Littleton confirmed that he would lead the walk on reading the forested landscape. Mr. Haynes said it was a good walk.

A motion by Mr. Haynes to pay Jeff Littleton of Moosewood Ecological a \$150 honorarium for the fall 2022 Goose Pond Through the Seasons Walk was duly seconded by Vice Chair Madison and the motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Haynes said the group also brainstormed starting to contact people for a Tap-to-Toilet event that was discussed pre-pandemic. The group still likes the idea and is aiming for fall 2023 with the hope that there would be a walk at the Roxbury Reservoir. The program would be four parts: 1) a walk, 2) a lecture, 3) visit the water supply, and 4) visit the Wastewater Treatment Plant. This would provide participants a history of Keene’s water.

Mr. Haynes noted that Mr. Bill was welcome to lead more geology walks. Mr. Bill thought about something in the spring.

Mr. Haynes reported that the Goose Pond Through the Seasons winter walk would be something on forest ecology and wildlife to educate people on the ecology of the forest. This is planned for mid-February 2023. There was also discussion of a spring 2023 bird walk, which was successful last year and could be in a different part of the forest this year. A summer program would be harder to plan but the group would continue discussing the possibility of an event with the New England Mountain Biking Association. In fall 2023, they discussed the idea of a history walk on some of Mr. Haynes’ research of the forest.

The group also discussed a spring amphibian walk at Robin Hood Park and Mr. Haynes had been reaching out to contacts about that. Also, the group discussed a birding/wildlife photo event at the Airport, which Mr. Bergman agreed would be a good idea in the spring, perhaps May. Mr. Bergman would bring further ideas to the working group.

Finally, this month the working group discussed a possible event on loons. Mr. Reilly is a member of the statewide Loon Association. However, there are no loon ponds within the City limits; options would be Spofford or the other side of RT-32 from the Airport in Swanzey at Wilson Pond.

### **C) Invasive Species**

Councilor Williams said the last event of the year was held on November 11 (Veteran's Day) and although it rained, there were seven participants, including a few students from around town who heard about the event online and came to Keene. During this event, the group pulled bittersweet vines, which were everywhere on this section of the Rail Trail by Eastern Avenue. They eliminated most vines around the parking area. That felt more effective to Councilor Williams than some of the other things they do because removing the vine unveiled trees that might survive now. He said the main innovation this time was that they did not bag the invasives, but rather gathered them into a brush pile on a raised palette. This pile would be monitored over the winter and there would be a judgement call in the spring about whether to ask the City to take it away or to let it go. A similar approach was used by a group on knotweed at the Ashuelot River Park. Councilor Williams said cutting down the invasives is the fun part but bagging them takes a lot of work and creates a lot of waste. In the future, he hopes to use a combination of garbage bags and brush piles. Chair Von Plinsky favored using less plastic.

### **D) Land Conservation**

#### **i) *30x30 Program***

Chair Von Plinsky said the working group would meet the next week for the first time in a while, and they would discuss the "30 x 30" program. The goal of this program is to conserve 30% of Keene's land by 2030, but part of that is figuring out where the City is now. To that end, the Commission proceeded to the next agenda sub-item.

#### **ii) *Antioch Collaborative Science Initiative Program***

The Chair and Ms. Brunner had applied since the last meeting (application was in the agenda packet) for an Antioch University New England Collaborative Science Initiative Program, which is for students seeking a studio project overseen by a mentor professor. Thus, the application was for students to spend a semester looking at all parcels of land in Keene and their current conservation status to determine areas best suited for conservation in the future—e.g., ease of access, resources, connectivity, etc. The students would develop a matrix to help guide the Commission as a starting point as they move forward toward a 30x30 goal. Next, the students

and associated instructors at the University will review the applications and let the City know whether they accept the project for the spring semester. If the proposal is not accepted, the Commission would move forward on this effort with less help. While there was no specific deadline for a decision listed on the application, the Chair hoped they would hear something before the winter break. He said it would be great to have motivated students to help sift through the data. The Chair and Ms. Brunner moved forward with the application without a Commission discussion because the opportunity and deadline had arisen since the last meeting and before this one. If the proposal is accepted, the Commission should have a motion to accept the project. The application was created by Antioch University.

Mr. Bergman appreciated the organized responses and workflow in the application because it would help guide the work group even if they do not have students participate. The Chair thought there were one or two professors supervising the students. Mr. Bergman cited a similar case from Keene State College. The Chair thinks this project is a good fit for the students and does not require them to travel far. The Commission budget or the City (the Chair would find out) would have to reimburse direct costs like student travel, office materials, equipment, etc. But there was no other associated fee with the student program.

Regarding the 30x30 program, Councilor Williams thought that for it to be effective, they would need to get into the upcoming Master Plan process, which he asked Ms. Brunner for more details on. Ms. Brunner said the Master Plan *Update* is upcoming; she was very specific that this is an update to the Master Plan, not a complete rewrite. This is expected to be underway in fall 2023, when funds are budgeted in the Capital Improvement Program. The first stage would be updating the community vision with lot of outreach, to ensure the assumption is correct that the community still supports the foundations of the 2010 Master Plan. In the second year, the community feedback and data would likely be outsourced to a consultant. Councilor Williams said it sounded like there would be a product in 2024–2025 and Ms. Brunner agreed. Councilor Williams said it sounded like community outreach was a critical part of the process and as considering 30x30, the Commission needed to think about how to go into the Master Plan process with the community saying they want to accept the project. The Commission would wait to make a recommended motion on this project after a more formal discussion of the idea and whether the Commission wants to recommend to the City Council and community to go after this goal. The Commission would discuss this more in the coming months as the working group makes more headway.

**4) Discussion Items**

**A) Conservation Commission Speaking Events**

Vice Chair Madison said he talked to Brett Amy Thelen from the Harris Center, who seemed interested in doing the first talk and thought it was a good idea. The Vice Chair wanted to follow a model similar to the Science Cafés in Concord and Nashua, which are usually in the evening at a restaurant with people interested in science. The guest would speak for 20 minutes, followed by 10 minutes of Q&A, and 30 minutes for networking. He wants to call Keene’s program

Conservation Cafés. He planned to discuss having the first event(s) at Brewbakers. He thought enough people would be interested to make it a worthy venture. He recalled that there is an Outreach budget for speakers' honorariums. The Vice Chair imagined the events starting at 6:00 PM and lasting one hour. He hoped to have this first event in January. He hoped for Commission attendance, but they would have to be careful to not establish a quorum. He wanted to work on ideas and how to advertise the event with the Outreach working group. The Vice Chair would reach out to the Harris Center and Monadnock Conservancy as potential partners to reach a wider audience. If the Parks and Recreation Department could not advertise these like most Outreach events, Ms. Brunner noted that they could be advertised on the Community Development Department social media. Mr. Reilly imagined repeat attendance month-after-month as the idea catches on. Vice Chair Madison said that if the idea blew-up, they could seek voluntary donations from participants to help keep it going. Everyone agreed that Brewbakers was a good location to start.

### **B) Airport Proposed Wildlife Control Fence**

The Airport Director, David Hickling, would be visiting the Commission in December and Commissioners were encouraged to bring questions. Mr. Bergman hoped the Airport Director would bring graphics or maps to allow a more concrete discussion of the project plan. The Chair would follow-up with Mr. Hickling. Mr. Bergman would share his report from a few years ago in the Google Drive as a reminder for the Commission.

### **C) Downtown Tree Inventory**

Mr. Haynes heard from Mr. Bohannon, who said there was a tree inventory on some of Main Street and to contact the Director of Public Works, which the Chair would follow-up on. Mr. Bergman mentioned a downtown tree inventory report from some local university students in 2010. Some reports he found were in software he did not have access to. Mr. Bergman added some files to the shared Google Drive on urban and municipal tree inventory sites, including one from a town that is similar in size to Keene. He said there were plenty of examples from across the country. Mr. Haynes mentioned the inventory of the Ashuelot River Park. Mr. Bergman mentioned the Bartlett Tree inventory at Keene State College, the latter of which was not in a format generally readable by the public. Councilor Williams is a professional and could help to access some of those inaccessible files. Councilor Williams also mentioned that the Keene Library also has a good record of their trees. Chair Von Plinsky said the first job might be to compile what exists before deciding a next step. Ms. Brunner found a tree inventory spreadsheet from 2015 that she would upload to the Google Drive; there was discussion of whether this was for street or private property trees, but no one was sure at this point.

Ms. Brunner reported that most downtown trees would likely be removed with the downtown utility project. The consultant for the project analyzed the trees and their conditions. Trees will be removed where needed for utility replacement or if they are diseased or dying. They will try to save the trees they can. There is a presentation on the downtown project website available via

the City of Keene homepage that shows what trees will remain. Mr. Bergman noted that at Keene State, the consultant provided a dollar value for each tree, noting that people should consider those construction losses.

Councilor Williams mentioned that recently at City Council, he and Vice Chair Madison voted to accept a donation of trees to Robin Hood Park. Gentle Dental will plant one tree at Robin Hood for each new patient. This is to replace a budget line for new trees that was removed from the Pat Russell Park project. The City would decide the specific trees to plant, and Councilor Williams was confident they would choose native species. The City's consulting forester might be Matt Kelly from the University of NH Extension. This would be on the agenda again in December.

**D) Photo Library**

**E) Shared Committee Folder on Google Drive**

All members should have received a link to the shared Google Drive and the public link was listed on the bottom of the agenda. The Public can click to view what is in the drive, but only the Commission can edit the contents. Anyone without a Gmail account should save the link they received from Ms. Brunner via email for future access. She and the Chair could help those without Gmail to access. This drive is shared with other City committees, and it could run out of space, at which point the Commission could consider paying for more storage. All Commissioners should be attentive to what they upload and edit because it is a public drive. Everyone was encouraged to try to use it before the next meeting.

It was agreed that the photo library should be on this drive and not associated with the Historical Society Flickr, which was still a work in progress.

**5) New or Other Business**

There was no new or other business reported.

**6) Adjournment – Next Meeting Date: Monday, December 19, 2022**

There being no further business, Chair Von Plinsky adjourned the meeting at 5:26 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Katrinya Kibler, Minute Taker  
November 30, 2022

Reviewed and edited by,  
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner