

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, February 21, 2023

4:30 PM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Chair
Councilor Robert Williams
Eloise Clark
Art Walker
Steven Bill (via Zoom)
Thomas Haynes, Alternate (Voting)
Brian Reilly, Alternate (Voting)
John Therriault, Alternate (Voting)
Lee Stanish, Alternate (Arrived Late)

Staff Present:

Jesse Rounds, Community Development
Director

Members Not Present:

Councilor Andrew Madison, Vice Chair
Ken Bergman

SITE VISIT: At 3:30 PM before the meeting, Commissioners conducted a site visit at 0 Black Brook Road (TMP #s 221-023-000 & 221-024-000).

1) Call to Order

Chair Von Plinsky called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM and roll call ensued.

2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – January 17, 2023

A motion by Mr. Walker to adopt the January 17, 2023 minutes was duly seconded by Mr. Haynes and the motion carried unanimously.

3) Referrals:

A) City Council Referral – Tree Trimming on Scenic Roads – Eversource

Chair Von Plinsky welcomed Dane D’Arcangelo, Arborist for Eversource Energy, to discuss the proposed tree trimming on the following scenic roads in Keene: Peg Shop Road, Chapman Road, Whitcombs Mill Road, Daniels Hill Road, Hurricane Road, Langley Road, Felt Road, and Stearns Road. The trimming is proposed for standard maintenance. The trimming zone is defined

by the topmost wire on the pole, which is the primary wire; trimming is conducted 15' above that wire, 10' below, and 8' to each side. Cutting this vegetation around the primary wire allows this trimming to occur only every 4–5 years to remove the regrowth since the last trim. There is no intention to remove large established “leaders,” but rather to remove the smaller “suckers” and edges of crowns of trees that have just started to encroach into the trim zone. This trimming would be conducted by Asplundh Tree Expert, who are required to contact the impacted homeowners for permission before any work occurs. Eversource needs permission from both the City of Keene and the homeowners to conduct any work on these private properties. Mr. D’Arcangelo said this work is necessary to ensure the safe distribution of power and to improve reliability of electric service for Eversource’s customers. Mr. D’Arcangelo welcomed questions.

Chair Von Plinsky asked what would happen if a landowner did not grant permission. Mr. D’Arcangelo said homeowners do have the right to refuse this trimming, in which case there is little that Eversource could do unless the City wanted to get involved. He said that homeowners typically understand that this work is necessary and there are few hard refusals. Chair Von Plinsky asked when this work would occur. Mr. D’Arcangelo replied that the work would begin in the Keene area this year and he expected that the Keene trimming would end by the middle of the year.

Mr. Reilly made the following motion, which Mr. Haynes seconded. On a vote of 8–0, the Conservation Commission approved Eversource scenic road tree trimming.

B) Planning Board Referral – Surface Water Protection Conditional Use Permit Application – SWP-CUP-01-23 – 0 Black Brook Road, Proposed Contractor Bays

Chair Von Plinsky welcomed John Noonan of Fieldstone Land Consultants, who was presenting on behalf of the applicant, Patriot Holdings, LLC. Mr. Noonan recalled the site visit and stated the intention to merge lots 221 and 223/224, which would provide a little more than 12.5 acres of land. Mr. Noonan said he was before the Conservation Commission because the proposed driveway for the site would cross the 30’ wetland buffer, which he demonstrated when the Commission was on site. He said the driveway location makes the most sense because of where utilities are located. He said the grade of the proposed driveway would be close to the current grade. He added that the driveway would be “super elevated” to one side; it would be “picked-up” at one point to direct any water off the road and into a grass treatment swale to minimize impact to the wetland resource and the buffer. Mr. Noonan said that during the site visit, he forgot to point out where on the far side, there is another 5’ encroachment at the stone spillway of the flood compensation basin to connect two low points. He said that once the floodplain compensation area is excavated, it would be planted with a northeast pollinator friendly wildflower mix in addition to some dogwoods and weeping willow trees; these areas would be left to reassume a natural state once planted. Mr. Noonan said the work would be offset by allowing these large areas between the river and constructed area to return to a natural state. Mr. Noonan recalled from the site visit that because this is in the floodplain, the buildings would be

raised a minimum of 18” above the floodplain elevation, which requires excavation to lower the grades on site between 1’–5’. Mr. Noonan said there would be no impacts to the wetland and the two locations where the buffer would be crossed are the only proposed impacts to the buffer; the driveway crossing would be a permanent buffer impact and the spillway would be a temporary impact.

Mr. Therriault thanked Mr. Noonan for choosing willows for replanting because they are one of the earliest pollen sources in the spring.

Mr. Bill asked whether the material removed for the flood basin would be used to build-up above the floodplain or whether new material would be brought on site. Mr. Noonan said it would be a combination. Mr. Noonan said the soil on site is sandy loam and most of the topsoil is deep because of past agriculture; the top soil would be stockpiled and used for loam on site. He said there would be overall excavation and export off the site. Mr. Noonan continued stating that construction fill would be used under the building foundations. Mr. Bill referred to a few islands in the parking lot and asked whether they were big enough for trees. Mr. Noonan replied that there are three parking lot islands and the two in the middle are large enough and would be planted with trees. He added that the Planning Board also requested that the islands have perennial flower plantings. Mr. Bill asked how big the islands are. Mr. Noonan said they are approximately 10’ wide by 36’ long, and there is one larger triangle shaped island.

Ms. Clark said she always has concern and sadness when good agricultural soils go to development. She said it is important to maintain agricultural soils. Chair Von Plinsky agreed. Ms. Clark continued stating that this is a 12.5-acre parcel and $\frac{3}{4}$ of it is a floodplain. She understood that there would be “compensations.” Intuitively, though, she said it did not seem like it would be enough for that much impervious surface to prevent runoff from eventually entering the brook and degrading things there and downstream. Ms. Clark asked Mr. Noonan about the metrics used to arrive at the proposed dimensions. Mr. Noonan replied that the driving factor is the building heights, which must be 1’ above the floodplain elevation. He continued stating that the grades for the parking lots determine the grades proposed. Then, he said they determine where the floodplain comes into those areas and how much they fill. He said it is a surface-to-surface model of the proposed topography versus the existing to determine how much is in the floodplain that they must compensate for to excavate and offset. Mr. Noonan also mentioned impacts from stormwater runoff, stating that basins and treatment swales would be built-in to retain and detain water on site. Thus, he said there would be no off-site flow. In comparison to the agricultural field that exists on site today, Mr. Noonan said there would be the same amount of water if not less leaving the site. As proposed, he said there would be a lot more compensation for flooding than what is needed.

Ms. Clark noted that the plans indicated 100-year floods, which are occurring more regularly now, in addition to even bigger floods. Ms. Clark asked how this site would hold-up to those bigger floods. Mr. Noonan replied that the requirement is for the 100-year flood so that is how the proposal was designed. He continued stating that on this site, they are overcompensating for

the floodplain. Mr. Noonan would not state that the site would withstand a 500-year flood but did say that it would handle more than a 100-year storm.

Ms. Clark asked who would maintain all of these drainage ditches, swales, etc., to ensure they function properly. Mr. Noonan said that as a part of the Alteration of Terrain Permit through NH Department of Environmental Services (DES), there is an inspection and maintenance manual required, within which it is specified who at the company is responsible for maintenance. Thus, Patriot Holdings, LLC, is responsible. Specifically, Jeremiah Boucher is responsible for ensuring that at least annually—if not semi-annually—inspections and maintenance occur, including photos, which are available to NH DES at any time they choose to check the logbooks.

Chair Von Plinksy heard comments from a member of the public, Dee Robbins, who asked if the aforementioned maintenance responsibility of Patriot Holdings, LLC, is in perpetuity; what happens if the ownership changes? Mr. Noonan said it is in perpetuity. He explained that as a part of NH law, if the property is sold NH DES must be notified, and the new owners would have to get a new permit and indicate who at the company is the new responsible individual.

Discussion ensued about the proper motion to make on this issue. Ms. Clark thought the Conservation Commission would only comment on the Planning Board Conditional Use Permit (CUP) because of wetland protection. Mr. Rounds agreed that impacts to the 30' wetland buffer were the concern.

Mr. Therriault made the following motion, which was duly seconded by Mr. Walker. On a vote of 8–0, the Conservation Commission recommended allowing this process to move forward in spite of the fact that the work would cross the 30' wetland buffer.

Ms. Stanish asked what would be done during construction to minimize impacts on the wetland. Mr. Noonan replied that the first 75' of the driveway would be a stabilized construction entrance that would limit any type of sediment tracking off of the site or downhill toward the wetland. Mr. Noonan said there would also be a double row of silt fence along the wetland areas as required by DES.

Ms. Clark asked who from DES would oversee this construction to ensure the wetland is protected as proposed. Mr. Noonan replied that his office would conduct inspections and as a part of the permit, his office must ensure the development is built per the plans, so photos are taken throughout the project.

4) Report-Outs

A) Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Subcommittee

Mr. Haynes reported that the Subcommittee met during the last month. They worked with the Director of Parks, Recreation, and Facilities, Andy Bohannon, to submit a scope of work for completing maintenance and work on the loop trail around Goose Pond. Mr. Haynes thought that

effort was working its way through the purchasing office and would go out to bid soon. He anticipated determination on who would do that work by the end of March. Mr. Walker mentioned that the March Subcommittee meeting would occur at Goose Pond to walk the contractors who applied through the proposed maintenance. Mr. Haynes said the prospect of completing all this work in one year was exciting. Mr. Haynes added that he continued making trail signs and he hoped to start hanging them in the next few weeks after this meeting. He said the Subcommittee was also closer to determining the larger maps for trailhead kiosks and the paper maps that are available to users at the kiosks.

Chair Von Plinsky asked where the official trailheads are. Mr. Haynes replied that there are two on East Surry Road and one on lower Drummer Hill. The entrance in the cul-de-sac near the water tower is not considered a trailhead. Mr. Haynes mentioned that an entrance near Chair Von Plinsky's home is also considered a trailhead.

B) Outreach

Mr. Haynes reported that there was a walk with Cheshire County Forester, Matt Kelly, on February 18. Ms. Clark said that she helped to lead the participants in identifying animal tracks, which was not optimal with the snow conditions. Ms. Clark said it was a great walk with 28 participants, including a family with a teenage son who would be attempting to lead a walk as a service project. There were also many interested and knowledgeable adults present, including some former professors and individuals from neighboring environmental education organizations. Ms. Clark thought these walks could draw a quality group of interested individuals if the events are advertised well. She said she told the participants about the upcoming walk with Steven Lamonde at the end of May.

Discussion ensued about whether there were too many participants at this February 18 walk and if the participation should be capped in the future. Ms. Clark said the sign-up was for a maximum of 15 participants, but many just showed-up on the day, which she said was fine. She mentioned some complaints about difficulty signing-up for these activities through the Parks and Recreation Department. She said a group of 30 was manageable but that upwards of 50 would be challenging. Mr. Haynes added that it depends on if the walk location allows enough space for that many participants to hear. Ms. Clark said it was not a problem on the 18th and that Mr. Kelly did really well. However, she said there were challenges with the icy conditions of the trails. Mr. Kelly emailed participants in advance to share where they could get spikes for their shoes so many people came with appropriate footwear.

Mr. Reilly discussed the upcoming spring walk at Goose Pond. Mr. Reilly said he contacted Mr. Lamonde, who did the bird walk in May 2022. This year, Mr. Lamonde would lead a walk on Memorial Day weekend: Sunday, May 28, from 8:00 AM–10:00 AM. Mr. Reilly needed to find out the maximum number of participants from Mr. Lamonde because if the group is too large it is hard for people to hear. Mr. Reilly and Ms. Clark thought it went well last year with 15

participants. Otherwise, everything is prepared for the spring walk. Mr. Haynes said the work group had not yet begun planning for the summer Goose Pond Through the Seasons walk.

Discussion ensued about the NH Drinking Water Festival on May 10. Mr. Haynes noted difficulty with this work group meeting in person because there are now four members, which would constitute a quorum. Thus, he wanted to discuss this with the whole Commission. Ms. Clark suggested some topics based on her experiences as an environmental educator. One suggestion was to focus on macroinvertebrates, or what Ms. Clark calls “muck monsters.” She suggested trying to capture some muck monsters and playing a matching game. Another focus could be water flow/water cycles and the importance of roots holding soil. Ms. Stanish has some water cycle maps. Ms. Clark noted that they would likely have groups of children for 20 minutes at a time during a five-hour time period, so there was potential to reach a lot of kids. Mr. Haynes noted that if plants were the focus, they would need a lot. Ms. Clark said she used to make “soil pies” with kids for lessons on wheat and the dustbowl to demonstrate how roots take hold of the soil. Ms. Clark was leaning more toward a lesson on macroinvertebrates. Ms. Stanish said it would be her first Drinking Water Festival and she supported focusing on macroinvertebrates. Ms. Clark said it would also be her first time at the statewide event that happens to be in Keene this year.

Mr. Haynes said the application was due at the end of February. Everyone agreed that one topic/activity would be better than many. Ms. Clark offered to complete the application and the work group would handle logistics at an upcoming meeting. There was also discussion of the work group consulting via email. There was consensus to focus on macroinvertebrates. Ms. Stanish would have to pay to print USGS water cycle maps. She could print one 8.5”x11” map with a QR code that participants could scan to access the digital maps. Ms. Clark said it would be great for the Commission to showcase this new USGS connection.

C) Invasive Species

Councilor Williams said activities are halted due to winter. However, the time was drawing near to plan for the 2023 Garlic Mustard Challenge. Fortunately, the location visited for the last few years no longer has garlic mustard. So, a new location was needed for this year’s event, which is usually during the first two weeks of May. He welcomed suggestions for new locations.

Councilor Williams said he wanted to focus on Japanese knotweed this year. He said everyone in his neighborhood was focused on the invasive. He mentioned the Ellis-Harrison Park north of George Street that he said could be lovely with a stream for kids to play. However, the stream is inaccessible due to what he called a wall of knotweed between the park and stream. He would like to focus on the Ellis-Harrison Park, and he noted that it takes multiple years to eradicate knotweed. First, he would like to clear a path to the stream. Chair Von Plinksy said it was a small enough park that the Conservation Commission might be able to “adopt” or “sponsor” it. Councilor Williams thought he might have a tentative schedule for this year’s invasive species activities at the March meeting.

D) Land Conservation

Chair Von Plinsky reported that this work groups did not meet last month. The Chair did have a few conversations with an Antioch University New England student about potentially taking this on as a capstone project. Unfortunately, the opportunity did not work out. Still, the Chair said the work group was in good shape with the documents Ms. Clark provided. Chair Von Plinsky thought that this group would have some land conservation documents to discuss by the April meeting.

Chair Von Plinsky recognized two other guests who were present: Karen Seabrook of the Harris Center and Keene State College (KSC), and BJ Haywood who is new to Keene and interested in the Commission's work.

5) Discussion Items:

A) Budget Discussion – Bee City USA Renewal

Mr. Therriault reported that the first renewal fee for the City's Bee City USA membership was due. Mr. Therriault made the following motion, which Mr. Haynes duly seconded. On a vote of 8-0, the Conservation Commission approved payment of \$200 to the Xerces Society—parent society of Bee City USA—for annual dues renewal.

B) Airport Proposed Wildlife Control Fence Update

Chair Von Plinsky said there had not been progress on this matter. He had turned the letter into Airport Director Hickling and the Chair assumed that was making its way through the necessary process. Mr. Haynes suggested that if Mr. Hickling comes to another Keene Conservation Commission meeting it might be prudent to invite the Swanzey Conservation Commission as a courtesy. Ms. Clark thought Mr. Hickling had met with them separately.

Chair Von Plinsky said he had also met with the chair of the Chesterfield Conservation Commission, who invited the Keene Conservation Commission to join the Wantastiquet-Monadnock Trail effort. Chair Von Plinsky said there is one annual meeting that Keene Trails also participates in. The trail is completed but there are always maintenance needs, including a current proposal for compostable toilets at some of the rustic campsites along the trail. The trail does pass through Keene. Chair Von Plinsky would add this to the March agenda for further discussion. Mr. Therriault wondered where to access the trail map and the Chair directed him to The Society for the Protection of NH Forests website, which includes trail maps: <https://forestsociety.org/wantastiquet-monadnock-trail>. Commissioners agreed that Keene's bike path is a part of this trail system.

C) Conservation Commission Speaking Events

Chair Von Plinsky said that Vice Chair Madison has some “Conservation Café” events planned at Brewbakers in the near future.

D) Photo Library

Chair Von Plinsky reported that he created a free Flickr account for the Conservation Commission. The email account associated with the Flickr is keenenh.conservationscommission@gmail.com. Moving forward, when Commissioners have photos from site visits or activities, they should email the photos to this email address. From there, the Chair would upload relevant photos to Flickr. This will create a running record of what sites look like before they are transformed. Chair Von Plinsky recalled that there is a 1,000-photo limit for the free Flickr and he thought the Commission could remain under that limit for a while. Ms. Clark mentioned what a shame it is that the Commission cannot have its own Facebook page, which she said is not allowed.

E) 2023 NH Drinking Water Festival

Discussion occurred earlier in the meeting.

6) New or Other Business

Councilor Williams mentioned the issue of littering along North Lincoln Street. At City Council a few weeks before this meeting, the Councilor raised this issue and particularly the littering around Woodlawn Cemetery. He said the prevalence and reoccurrence of littered beer cans and bottles is concerning. He said there is a lot of community support for deterring this activity. He collects the litter a few times per month and others do as well. One concern about this location is that this is where the well-known and supported annual salamander crossing occurs.

Ms. Seabrook had reached out to Councilor Williams about getting KSC students involved in the litter clean-up. Ms. Seabrook said she was glad to be invited to this meeting and to liaise for this student volunteer effort. She said she had worked at KSC in the environmental studies department since 2009 and she had worked at the Harris Center since 2020 with Brett Thelen, who leads the annual amphibian crossing. Ms. Seabrook said that Harris Center employees had noticed this trash issue in the past but that the accumulation seems to be increasing. She said this was not uncommon as litterbugs often have patterns of behavior in places where they think they can dispose of trash under the radar. She said that amphibian crossing volunteers have brought bags in the past to clean-up during the effort. She is always looking for ways to get her students better involved in the City and thought this might be a good volunteer opportunity, which would familiarize students with the location during the day so they are prepared for crossing nights. She has support from some environmental student organizations at KSC that want to get involved. Ms. Seabrook had also met with Public Works Department Staff, who offered to collect and

dispose of the bags of litter. She thought it was prudent to get a handle on some of this litter before the amphibian breeding season begins, when disruption and contamination of the wetland becomes more problematic.

Chair Von Plinsky thought this effort could be modeled after the invasive species activities, with one Commissioner taking the lead. He agreed that the Public Works Department is very helpful with collecting trash bags. He thought it was good to start with North Lincoln Street as a model. Councilor Williams was happy to take the lead. Ms. Seabrook said that the more residents who take part in this effort the better because students come and go. Councilor Williams knows of at least a few neighbors who are interested in helping.

Mr. Therriault suggested collecting some of the litter before the ground softens in the next month. Ms. Seabrook agreed that it should happen sometime in March before breeding season. Mr. Therriault asked whether salamander migration could be calculated based on the growing degree days. Ms. Seabrook said no, it is all based on nighttime rain with thawed ground. They usually only know the day of an event whether the evening conditions would be suitable, which is challenging because the Public Works Department must be notified by noon on the day of a closure.

Mr. Bill said that if a lot of the litter is aluminum, it could incentivize people collecting it for recycling. Councilor Williams thought that by volume, most of it would be cans, so he thought there would need to be forethought to separating those. Ms. Seabrook agreed and said that collecting the aluminum is usually the initial goal, but they find it is hard to stay true to the sorting. She noted challenges that arise with litter that contains unknown substances. Ms. Clark mentioned that she cleans-up on Roxbury and Branch Roads and said that she does sort recyclables. She said there are always more recyclables by volume.

Councilor Williams would be the point of contact for this effort and would try to rally some neighbors. Ms. Seabrook would talk to some students about a good date and then contact Councilor Williams. The Councilor would share the details with Ms. Brunner and/or Mr. Rounds for advertisement on the City's social media. Councilor Williams wondered if volunteers would need to sign disclaimers for the City. He had volunteers sign waivers for pulling invasive species but he said no one from the City asked for them. Mr. Rounds agreed to find out if waivers are needed. Mr. Bill suggested providing gloves to volunteers. Given that the Public Works Department had been so helpful providing trash bags, Chair Von Plinsky thought they might be able to provide gloves for this effort as well. Ms. Robbins asked who would monitor traffic on the road. Ms. Seabrook said she could provide some reflective vests. Councilor Williams said that student volunteers might also be able to access litter more easily in the swamp or forest. On that note, Ms. Seabrook said she could also bring some waders and boots.

Mr. Therriault said he presented before the United Church of Christ's Women's Club in December 2022 on protecting pollinators. They invited him to return in November or December

2023 and he suggested a talk on the work of the Conservation Commission. Mr. Therriault will alert the Chair if any help is needed.

7) **Adjournment – Next Meeting Date: Monday, March 20, 2023**

Chair Von Plinsky would not be present in March. There being no further business, Chair Von Plinsky adjourned the meeting at 5:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katryna Kibler, Minute Taker
February 27, 2023

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner
Jesse Rounds, Director