

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, June 13, 2023

8:15 AM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Arthur Winsor, Chair
Ruzzel Zullo, Vice Chair
Stephen Hooper
Paul Bocko
Suzy Krautmann
Thomas Haynes, Alternate

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Director of Parks,
Recreation & Facilities

Members Not Present:

Councilor Bettina Chadbourne
Dian Mathews

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Winsor called the meeting to order at 8:17 AM.

2) Approval of May 9, 2023 Minutes

Mr. Bocko made a motion to approve the minutes of the May 9, 2023 meeting. Ms. Krautmann seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

3) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon stated the report he distributed is just informational.

4) Report from Friends of the Ashuelot River Park Arboretum

Leslie Casey, a member of the Friends' board, gave a report based on the minutes of the Friends' board meeting, as she was unable to attend much of the meeting.

The biggest issue is over the Samaritans installing plantings and stones independently of the City or the Friends. The Samaritans planted flowers and a shrub in a bed and placed a stone in the center of the bed, with a marking for "Pearl's Place." Mr. Bohannon stated that he spoke with the Samaritans in the past about moving the stone. They agreed to move the stone. He connected

them to Ms. Mathews to discuss their plans. They scheduled a meeting, but the Samaritans did not attend. Rainey Carlson, a member of the Friends' board, stated there is also a wooden sign with their name on it lying on the left side of the path between the handicap parking spaces and the arch. Mr. Bohannon responded that he would take a look and have it cleaned up.

Chair Winsor speculated there was a miscommunication between the Friends and the Samaritans about buying stones. Ms. Carlson expressed anger about the Samaritans' activities. Mr. Bohannon reiterated that the Samaritans must work with the Friends to purchase and install stones, and they must coordinate plantings with Ms. Mathews. He stated that he had the Samaritans remove a paver they installed without permission last year, noting the information on the paver is not allowed at the Park. He noted that the Samaritans decided to disband recently.

Ms. Casey noted that the Samaritans planted in a currently empty bed that is supposed to be planted in line with the master plan. Ms. Krautmann suggested asking the Samaritans to move the plantings. In response to Ms. Carlson's question, Ms. Casey stated that most of the plants the Samaritans planted are annuals. She noted that the Friends have a spreadsheet carefully tracking all the stones in the Park. Mr. Bohannon said the Samaritans removed a stone and installed a new one without permission. Ms. Carlson said the Samaritans planted a lilac shrub last year that they should not have. Chair Winsor offered that Keene State College identified existing trees on campus that people could dedicate by buying a stone marker after receiving requests to plant a tree to dedicate to someone, in an effort to avoid having a random hodgepodge of plants on campus. Ms. Casey expressed frustration that the Samaritans thought it was okay to just plant what they wanted in a City-owned park. Ms. Carlson said the Samaritans bought 16 stones, had them carved, and expected to install them in a public park without permission. They need to pay the Friends for the stones. Chair Winsor reiterated they must buy the stones through the Friends. Ms. Carlson said that is the only way for the Friends to make money. Mr. Bohannon reiterated the Samaritans would be folding at the end of the month.

Mr. Haynes noted that people try to do helpful work at Goose Pond without coordinating with the City; sometimes they are helpful; sometimes they are not. Mr. Bocko said this also happens in the Rachel Marshall area. Ms. Krautmann wondered if someone should write an article about the issue. Chair Winsor said it is no problem to remove any unauthorized installations, but it is best to document any actions with Mr. Bohannon. Ms. Carlson asked if the lilac bush could be removed and put in the shed. Chair Winsor said yes.

Continuing with her report, Ms. Casey stated better coordination with City staff in certain areas would be helpful. For example, staff changed locks at the Park without informing the Friends, although Ms. Mathews has a key. Ms. Carlson asked about the status of the work on the rain garden, which she had gone over with Tim. Tim is lead cemetery staff, and he is getting a national certification in green infrastructure. According to Mr. Bohannon, Ms. Mathews agreed to postpone planting the rain garden until after June 22's Pollinator Palooza due to a grant extension, although he initially asked staff to complete the work by June 20. Ms. Carlson thinks Ms. Mathews postponed removal and planting because it wouldn't be completed by June 20, but

she isn't sure. The Friends have \$800 worth of plants waiting to be planted. Mr. Bohannon will remind staff to plant the plants this week, if possible. Chair Winsor asked if the area could be fenced off during work. Mr. Bohannon said he isn't sure why there is a hold up, but he will ask.

Ms. Carlson reported that the Friends got a couple new volunteers. There is one amazing young woman who got into the river and pulled knotweed out. There is another woman from Troy who volunteered twice. Chair Winsor asked about posting a request for volunteers in the ELF on an ongoing basis. Ms. Casey said that is a great idea, and the Friends will try to put an advertisement together.

Ms. Carlson is now the Friends' treasurer. She files the Friends' federal forms, among other duties.

Ms. Casey returned to discussion about improving communication with staff. She asked if Ms. Mathews has contact information for staff. She asked if staff should attend this Board's meetings. Mr. Bohannon suggested they talk separately after the meeting about the staff issues.

The Friends will have a table at June 22's Pollinator Palooza.

Sophie Wickland, a student at Antioch University, is the community engagement and trail assessment intern for the Monadnock Outdoors Initiative, a program of the Healthy Monadnock Alliance. She is leading a casual walk of the Jonathan Daniels trail. The walk is tentatively scheduled for the evening of July 27.

Mr. Bohannon reported that there is a new program to assess trails. A machine travels along a trail and provides immediate feedback about accessibility. The City is renting the machine from UNH Durham to assess the Jonathan Daniels trail. It is only a one-day rental, so other trails will not be assessed yet. Additional personnel are also required. Ms. Krautmann asked when the assessment would be done. Mr. Bohannon said he isn't sure.

Ms. Carlson reported the Friends are pulling invasive plants, even though some have lovely sweet-smelling flowers in bloom right now. The biggest area of them is near where the Jonathan Daniels trail turns toward the compost area and has tripled in size. The Friends might leave one section to grow for now but cut it down before the plants go to seed.

5) Park Discussion – Master Plan Implementation
A) Rachel Marshall Area

Chair Winsor wants to pursue the area as a bird habitat or bird walk. There was a recent story on NHPR about the lack of bird habitat and the dwindling population of birds in the area. The Rachel Marshall area is already a good bird habitat, but it could be enhanced with plantings to encourage birds and bats. He wants people to use the trails in the area. Mr. Bohannon asked if he

wants to have bird houses built and installed. Ms. Carlson reminded Mr. Bohannon to obtain a wildlife inventory. Chair Winsor said houses and plantings that attract birds should be put in.

Mr. Bocko asked if Steven Lamonde is still doing bird walks for the City. Ms. Casey responded that he did one last year, and Ms. Mathews is in touch with him. He is an Antioch graduate. He works with Jeff Littleton at Moosewood Ecological. He is very knowledgeable about birds. There is also an ornithologist on Antioch's faculty, Mike Akresh, who could help inform the Board about what to do to attract birds. The Board could even compensate them. Mr. Hooper volunteered to make a couple birdhouses for no charge. Chair Winsor asked Mr. Bocko to get in touch with Mr. Lamonde and Mr. Akresh. Mr. Bocko wondered if there is a way to get schoolkids involved. He wondered if the Board could pay Mr. Lamonde a stipend to lead kids on a bird walk.

Chair Winsor wants people to have a purposeful visit. He suggested putting in some overlooks for bird watching, noting it would follow the master plan. Mr. Bocko suggested recruiting a student. He said Kyle created a StoryMap of various displays. He wondered if a digital guide for visitors to use on their cell phone could be created. Ms. Krautmann wondered about having binoculars available for visitor use. Chair Winsor suggested installing binoculars at overlooks. Mr. Bohannon noted the lending library might also be able to offer binoculars.

Chair Winsor urged the Board to "front burner" this.

B) Kiosk Information

Chair Winsor reported that he has not yet met with Peter Poanessa. He asked Mr. Hooper if he has photos to accompany the narrative history of the Park. He said he is still waiting for the timeline from Ms. Mathews. Mr. Bohannon suggested just putting up some historical photos they already have. Mr. Bohannon visited the kiosk with Chair Winsor and Ms. Mathews recently. The timeline will go across the bottom, and the narrative will go above it. A tree must come down, so both sides of the kiosk are accessible.

Mr. Bocko said he proposed to the subgroup for the kiosk information including several pieces of information about indigenous history. He spoke with Rich Holshchuh and Chief Paul [Bunnell] from the Abenaki nation, both of whom support including references to indigenous history on the timeline. Chair Winsor suggested the subcommittee meet before the next Board meeting. Mr. Bocko also confirmed the Friends are the "Friends of the Ashuelot River Park Arboretum."

C) Bartlett Tree

Getting in touch with Frank about the work Bartlett Tree will be doing this summer is the next item on Mr. Bohannon's to do list. Ms. Carlson reported that the tree next to the maple tree coming out is split down the trunk. Mr. Bohannon responded that he would talk to Frank and Tim about it. In response to a question from Chair Winsor, Mr. Bohannon said the Kentucky coffee tree is looking better.

6) **New, Other Business**

A) **Pollinator Palooza – June 22, 2023, 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM**

Chair Winsor stated that all is in order for the event. Mr. Bohannon stated that the Friends would have a table at the event. He asked whether the Board would have a table. Chair Winsor said he does not think so but supposed Board members could join the Friends' table and provide information or answer questions. In response to a question from Mr. Haynes, Ms. Carlson explained there would 15 organizations and vendors participating in the event, plants with information around the rain garden, etc., whereas last year, it was just a few tables and a display with butterflies and bees. Mr. Bocko offered to be at the table for part of the time. Chair Winsor did, as well.

Chair Winsor reported that he is giving a presentation about the Park's history at the Keene Senior Center on September 6, 2023. It will be at the Center to accommodate some of the attendees' mobility and transportation limitations.

He also reported that he continues to take photos at the Park to add to the inventory of trees.

Mr. Hooper advised that Cornell University has an "eBird" app that tracks information on bird sightings. The app shows 119 bird sightings of around 60 species at the Park. The environment at the Park supports a lot of species. It's a good place for bird watching. Chair Winsor said he uses the app, and it is amazing. Mr. Hooper finds the app is pretty accurate in identifying birds. Mr. Haynes asked if the data is available to download, so the Board can build on it for creating a list of birds at the Park. Mr. Hooper said he believes so. He also noted the app shows over 200 species observed at the airport in Keene; 40 to 50 species are seen on a regular basis there. There is also the "Merlin" bird identification app.

Mr. Bohannon said for the first time, he saw some killdeer in Keene, at Russell Park, after the City channelized and filtered stormwater before letting it discharge into Beaver Brook. He pointed out that changes in the environment can bring in bird species.

Mr. Bocko asked for direction from the Board. He reported that Mr. Holshchuh, public liaison for the Elnu Abenaki Tribe out of Brattleboro, agreed to do a walk in the Park highlighting an indigenous perspective, and he expects it to be illuminating. Ms. Casey suggested having him come to a Friends board meeting to discuss the indigenous perspective. Mr. Bocko suggested having a public program. Mr. Bohannon suggested scheduling something for July, which is parks and recreation month. He needs a short write-up about the event, so his department can promote and take registrations for the walk. The program could be free, but the department needs to know how many people would be attending. Usually, similar programs attract about 15 people. Mr. Bocko suggested a Saturday afternoon event. Mr. Bohannon indicated a weekday evening event can also attract a lot of people. He also suggested a weekend event be scheduled for the morning to avoid the hottest part of the day. Mr. Bocko asked about offering Mr. Holshchuh a stipend. He

said Antioch pays \$150 as an honorarium for programs at the preserve; Mr. Haynes said he pays that for walks, as well. Chair Winsor suggested the Board vote on this at its next meeting, once more information is available.

7) **Adjourn – Next Meeting Tuesday, July 11, 2023, 8:15 AM**

There being no further business, Chair Winsor adjourned the meeting at 9:14 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Wendy Chen, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation and Facilities Director