

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

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

**Monday, September 18, 2023**

**4:30 PM**

**Room 22,  
Recreation Center**

**Members Present:**

Councilor Andrew Madison, Vice Chair  
Councilor Robert Williams  
Art Walker  
Ken Bergman  
Thomas Haynes, Alternate (Voting)  
Brian Reilly, Alternate (Voting)  
Deborah LeBlanc, Alternate (Voting)

**Staff Present:**

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner

**Members Not Present:**

Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Chair  
Eloise Clark  
Steven Bill  
John Therriault, Alternate  
Lee Stanish, Alternate

**1) Call to Order**

Vice Chair Madison called the meeting to order at 4:31 PM.

**2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – August 21, 2023**

Revisions: Steven Bill should be listed as a regular member. On line 65 and 66, change references to “knotweed” to “purple loosestrife.” On line 173, change references to “Liberty elms” to “elms.”

A motion by Mr. Haynes to adopt the August 21, 2023 meeting minutes as amended was duly seconded by Mr. Bergman and the motion carried unanimously.

**3) Report-Outs**

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

Mr. Haynes said the Subcommittee had met since the last meeting. The hired contractor, Lew Shelley of Snowhawk LLC, finished his work and there had been mostly positive feedback on

that trail maintenance, including new boardwalks in muddy areas and stream crossings. The Director of Parks, Recreation, and Facilities, Andy Bohannon, was pleased with this work. Larger trail maps were ready to be placed at the various kiosks and trailheads, as well as some for the interior of the loop trail. Mr. Haynes said there were still some small projects remaining that were not a part of Mr. Shelley's contract that the Subcommittee would be working on—Friday mornings and weekends—through the fall. At their next meeting, the Subcommittee would be creating a prioritized list of projects for next year to determine whether funding is needed.

### **B) Outreach**

Mr. Haynes recalled that he would be stepping back as the leader of this work group and he was seeking someone from the new generation of Commissioners to take the lead. He clarified that this is general community conservation outreach and not specific to the Greater Goose Pond Forest. Vice Chair Madison suggested tabling this conversation until the next meeting when more Commissioners would hopefully be present.

### **C) Invasive Species**

Councilor Williams reported that there had been two invasive species removal events since the last meeting. First, six volunteers pulled Japanese knotweed at the Ladies' Wildwood Park and exposed how much knotweed is still there to address, which would likely require herbicide treatment. Councilor Williams stated some ways to address knotweed: physically remove by hand, bury and cover with a tarp (introduces black plastic that is not environmentally friendly), or herbicide. He recalled the Director of Public Works, Kürt Blomquist, noting that many trees need to be removed from Ladies' Wildwood Park. Councilor Williams thought the Commission should be coming up with plans for succession of the forest cover there.

More recently, there was another knotweed pull at Robin Hood Park. This was the third year addressing knotweed at this location, but the problem keeps coming back each year; some areas are under better control, but the knotweed is not eliminated. Councilor Williams had been expanding where they are addressing knotweed in Robin Hood Park. The Councilor also mentioned the problem with Norway maples at Robin Hood Park. In the Robin Hood Park redesign, he hoped there would be money set aside for basic control options, like chain sawing.

Regarding the forest canopy at Ladies' Wildwood Park, Mr. Haynes wondered if it would make sense to ask the Cheshire County Forester, Matt Kelly, to attend a site visit or a Commission meeting. Councilor Williams thought it was a good idea to get some recommendations. Vice Chair Madison agreed that the trees planted in the park after the 1938 hurricane were reaching the end of their useful lives. He said it would only take one winter storm to turn Ladies' Wildwood Park into a meadow filled with knotweed.

**D) Land Conservation**

The work group had not met.

**4) Discussion Items**

**A) Keene Meadow Solar Station Project Update**

Ms. Brunner had no updates to report. The last she heard from Glenvale Solar was that they were optimistic about scheduling a site visit in early August, but that did not occur, and she had not heard an update. Glenvale Solar's next step was to get City Council permission for a building permit for a lot that only has frontage on a Class VI road, which also had not occurred yet.

Mr. Bergman asked if Glenvale Solar originally requested to merge the two lots; he was recalling something that was not permitted. Ms. Brunner reported that the company had appeared before the Zoning Board of Adjustment and received the two variances—one for each lot—needed to have a solar array with a footprint greater than 20 contiguous acres. Vice Chair Madison said the company still had a long way to go before completing this project. It would be important for Commissioners to attend any site visits. When it looks like the project is moving forward, the company's representatives could be invited to another Commission meeting.

**B) Potential Land Purchase Update (Rt-9/Washington St. Ext. Property)**

Vice Chair Madison had not heard any updates about this at the Council level. Ms. Brunner reported at the last meeting that the City Manager tried negotiating with the property owner, Hull Forest Products, who asked for a much higher selling price—\$150,000—than the City Council had approved. This Commission could recommend paying the higher price to the City Council. However, that purchase would deplete the Land Use Change Tax Fund (currently \$155,000, does not run out at the end of the year, and is maxed at \$500,000), which is added to every year (minimum \$25,000) and must be used only for conservation. Mr. Haynes suggested that this was not the best time to debate this, since several Commissioners were not present.

Mr. Bergman wondered approximately how much Hull Forest Products would be paying in taxes on that land in the next 6 months to 1 year if they refuse to sell. Ms. Brunner said she could ask the Assessing Department. Mr. Bergman imagined that if the taxes were only \$2,000–\$3,000 per year, they might not want to sell if they still think they can get a better price than what the City can offer. Mr. Haynes agreed that could be the case if they do not get other offers.

Mr. Bergman also recalled discussion at the last meeting about whether the City could buy just one of the parcels. Ms. Brunner was unsure whether there was enough flexibility in the City Council's last vote on this to adjust the offer in that way; she would look back at the language but thought it was specifically for both properties. Mr. Bergman wondered if there was a way to partner with the Monadnock Conservancy to help with purchase while the parcels are still

available. The last Mr. Bergman spoke with Ryan Owens, Executive Director of the Monadnock Conservancy, about these parcels and others nearby, he told Mr. Bergman that the owners of other parcels would not speak to him. Mr. Bergman wondered how an organization like the Monadnock Conservancy would value (ecological or conservation) these parcels. He recalled that the City had given the Conservancy money to help them make other land purchases, such as for property in Gilsum, for example. Mr. Haynes thought the Commission needed to have a conversation and discuss all the possible variables. Mr. Bergman did not want to lose the chance to acquire these properties. Mr. Haynes suggested talking to the Director of Parks, Recreation, and Facilities, Andy Bohannon, since some oversight might be under his jurisdiction.

Vice Chair Madison agreed that there is an opportunity that he did not want to see lost, but he did not think there would be much change in the month before the next Commission meeting. He would talk to the City Manager about the options and potential to partner with other conservation organizations as a way to increase buying power. Mr. Bergman recalled that the Monadnock Conservancy has their own criteria for valuing land.

Ms. LeBlanc asked whether there is a group, like the Coalition, that all Conservancy projects feed into. Vice Chair Madison did not think so. Mr. Bergman thought this would be an open land committee. While they operate independently of each other, Vice Chair Madison said the Monadnock Conservancy and the Society for the Protection of NH Forests generally operate in the same way; the latter tends to do bigger projects.

Ms. Brunner asked if the Commission had to choose one of the properties to purchase, which they would choose. There was discussion that the Beaver Brook Canyon property might be best because it has recreational value. Tom Haynes agreed but noted that the Route 9 property is contiguous with the Greater Goose Pond Forest. Mr. Bergman thought the Washington Street/Beaver Brook parcel was also less developable and might be harder for the owner to sell as a standalone, which is probably why they want to keep the two properties together. However, he thought the other larger parcel might be more ecologically interesting in terms of landscape values. He recalled a bull moose seen near the larger parcel on Route 9, and added that there is a lot of wildlife going through there. The larger the tract of land, the more likely it is to have wildlife value. Mr. Haynes thought the property north of the highway was more likely to be developed than the smaller, narrower parcel. However, it does have issues with access from the public right-of-way. Mr. Bergman thought that for developers, where there is a will, there is a way.

Vice Chair Madison would talk to the City Manager, and this should remain on the agenda for next month.

### **C) Airport Proposed Wildlife Control Fence Update**

There were no updates.

**D) Conservation Commission Speaking Events**

There were no updates.

**E) Wantastiquet-Monadnock Coalition – Request for Commission Assistance with Construction of a Bathroom Along the Wantastiquet-Monadnock Trail**

Ms. Brunner had no updates but recalled that Chair Von Plinsky had agreed to take the lead at the last meeting. The Coalition is seeking financial assistance up to \$500 and seeking volunteers to build a bathroom near the Horatio Colony Nature Preserve part of the trail, which is not on City land. Ms. LeBlanc recalled that she attended a Coalition meeting on behalf of the Commission. She said the Coalition had asked about the Commission helping to create the tent site on the Horatio Colony Nature Preserve. Since that meeting, she had received an email from the Chair of the Chesterfield Conservation Commission, which Ms. LeBlanc forwarded to Chair Von Plinsky, who said he would follow up. There was no date scheduled yet to construct the tent site. This should remain on the agenda for an update from Chair Von Plinsky next month.

**F) Neighborhood Pollinator Garden Update**

Ms. Brunner recalled that Mr. Therriault volunteered to follow-up with Mr. Bohannon (Director of Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) and Mr. Blomquist (Public Works Director) about the request from residents of the Edgewood community to plant a pollinator garden in their common area. Currently, that area is just grass that the City mows and some burning bush. Ms. Brunner was unsure if Mr. Therriault had those conversations yet. Mr. Bergman thought City Staff intended to check if there were any deeds on the parcel that would prevent this. This should remain on the agenda next month for an update from Mr. Therriault.

**G) Antioch University CSI Proposals**

Ms. Brunner recalled discussing this at the last meeting. The Antioch University New England Community Service Initiative (CSI) proposals are due at the end of September. She recalled Commissioners mentioning submitting a proposal for tree inventories, such as at Ladies' Wildwood Park, but Ms. Brunner was unaware of any proposals submitted. Mr. Haynes noted that he had some ideas for possible projects at Goose Pond, but the Subcommittee was not yet in a position to submit a proposal for that; he thought it was more likely next year. Vice Chair Madison and Mr. Haynes agreed this would be good to keep on the agenda so any proposals could be refined during the next year. Ms. Brunner mentioned that the CSIs are very deadline-driven, but there are also master's projects and internships that are more flexible, and proposals for those could be submitted to Antioch at any time to see if there is an interested student(s).

5) **New or Other Business**

Mr. Bergman mentioned that daily, he drives past the bypass and T-intersection by Best Western and Filtrine. He recalled that the Commission reviewed plans for a more modest scale project, so he was concerned with the large equipment that had been there weeks or months. The soil and turf had been disturbed over quite a large area. He said they were building mountains of earth and then leveling them. He was concerned about the heavy trucks going in and out of traffic. He asked for an update on the project.

Ms. Brunner reported that this is a NH Department of Transportation (DOT) project for floodplain compensatory storage, accounting mostly for the Winchester Street/Rt-101 roundabout project. Overall, she thought it was 20 acre-feet of compensatory storage accounting for three different projects that impacted the floodplain. The digging is supposed to be just above the water table, so that it will not actually fill with water, but might become more like a wetland over time. Mr. Bergman wondered if DOT was putting in any impervious or porous materials; are they promoting drainage or wetlands development? Vice Chair Madison did not think they would be adding impervious surface. He thought it would be gravel, covered and graded to promote infiltration and aquifer recharge so water goes somewhere other than roads or people's basements. The Vice Chair suggested inviting the Public Works Director, Kürt Blomquist, or someone from DOT to the next meeting for an update.

6) **Adjournment – Next Meeting Date: Monday, October 16, 2023**

There being no further business, Vice Chair Madison adjourned the meeting at 5:07 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Katrinya Kibler, Minute Taker  
September 25, 2023

Reviewed and edited by,  
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner