

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, March 11, 2025

8:15 AM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Paul Bocko, Chair
Suzy Krautmann, Vice Chair
Leslie Casey (until 9:15 AM)
Arthur Winsor, Alternate
Thomas Haynes, Alternate

Staff Present:

Carrah Fisk-Hennessey, Director of Parks,
Recreation

Members Not Present:

Dian Mathews
Kelly Cook

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Bocko called the meeting to order at 8:19 AM. Roll call was conducted. The ARPAB welcomed Karen Flavin and Raynee Carlson from the Friends of Ashuelot River Park Arboretum, and guests Ed Haas, Rob Hamm, and Amy Holtz

2) Approval of February 11, 2025 Minutes

Ms. Casey noted a correction to the minutes. Line 215 says she spoke about mussels (in the waterway), but she was not the one who said that and does not know who said it. Discussion ensued about who might have said it. Chair Bocko suggested the minutes be changed to “It was noted that...”, since they do not know for sure.

Ms. Krautmann made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of February 11, 2025, as amended. Ms. Casey seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Chair Bocko noted that alternate member Mr. Winsor is a voting member today.

3) Report from Friends of Ashuelot River Park Arboretum

Ms. Casey reported on behalf of the Friends:

- A committee of the Friends submitted two grant applications, one to Mascoma and one to C&S. The funds would be used to create and expand the pollinator garden, and if there are any additional funds, they would be put towards plants for the West St. bed. They had a bequest from Dorothy Arwe. Once the CD that holds those monies matures in April, the Friends might put some of that toward a memorial tree and plaque in her honor.
- Thinking about the season ahead and the difficulties with watering, and the Friends' plans for putting in many new plans, they will put some long hoses discreetly in the beds and leave them there for the season. They will also invest in some watering bags that hold several gallons of water.
- At some point they will hopefully be talking about the parking lot runoff and its relationship to the plans for a rain garden, but there is nothing to add about this right now.
- Regarding digital marketing, they sent an informative email to the Friends board about the need to find someone. It turns out a Friends member, Jen Roberts, does digital marketing for work, and is interested in doing this for the Friends. She will create a Facebook page and update the Friends' Charity Navigator profile. Charity Navigator allows donations through their portal, so Ms. Roberts will put a link to that.
- The Friends are conscious of the fact that they need to be careful with how they word things, so that if they invite the public to participate in the park, people do not think that just anybody can come in and do anything. People need to notify the Friends in advance, and they need to think about what their skill level is, for example.
- Dian Mathews will write a letter to Mascoma about how the snow piles in the beds are a problem. The Friends are considering putting a seasonal snow fence across the handicapped parking posts/signs.
- Once the snow is gone, they will assess the leaf mulch and try to redistribute that if necessary, before the daffodils come up.
- The pruning demonstration through UNH is coming up in April. They will do a walk-through on March 13 at 3:00 PM. Steph Sosinski said it was not practical to think about TV coverage this time around, but maybe for next year. The Friends got the official okay for the language in the ads, and Ms. Sosinski gave them a logo. She was adamant about the Friends using a phrase about accessibility and who to contact for that.
- Keeping in mind that it is the 30th anniversary of the Friends, they are still thinking about ideas.
- They are reviewing the Friends bylaws. The bylaws would support a much bigger non-profit than the Friends are at this time. There is a lot of emphasis on incorporators versus board of directors versus Friends having their own organization, so they are looking at (making changes to those).

Ms. Casey asked if the other Friends members had anything to add. Ms. Carlson stated that the Friends now have a letterhead to use, which was required by C&S (when they submitted the grant application), and the letterhead has a nice photo. Discussion ensued about the letterhead and the grants. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey asked if the Friends had approached the 100+ Women Who Care group (for funding). Friends members replied that they are thinking about it and talking about it. Discussion continued.

4) Finance Report

A) Budget Development

Chair Bocko stated that they are in the new budget year. He continued that at the last meeting, they talked about budget development and how they have some hard decisions to make, especially about how to come within a certain amount. He thinks \$10,000 to \$12,000 is the range. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that it will probably be around \$12,500. Chair Bocko stated that one general thing to look at on the document is to look at the line items, and what they need and might do there. Then they will talk about Bartlett Tree. That was a big sticking point. What might have been surprising to the ARPAB is some transition coming up with tree data. They need to do some software things to maintain that, which costs money. He suggests they talk about that first, while keeping in mind the other lines, also keeping in mind that Antioch Bird Ecology is done; that can be a zero. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey added that they should keep in mind, too, that they have only done half of Mark Johnson's contract, so there is another \$1,900 that will come out.

Chair Bocko stated that he and Mr. Winsor talked about Bartlett Tree and they have a proposed path forward, to do important work and hopefully bring the contract in line so they can move forward and stay within their range. He asked Mr. Winsor to speak more about this.

Mr. Winsor stated that he was surprised when Bartlett Tree said they need to re-inventory. He continued that they want the inventory updated, but he did not realize they had to do it all over again. He wrestled with the idea of maybe not inventorying and just labeling the trees and doing it on their own, but realized that the database is so important. The value of the trees, which needs to be updated, is probably over a million dollars. It is something the ARPAB needs to protect and have reasons to justify. One item (Bartlett) has is "summer tree and shrub work," and they mention the Silver Maple and the Siberian Elm. He looked at those trees last week as best as he could, given the ice, and will look closer later. He suggests they consider eliminating the Siberian Elm instead of saving it, as it is invasive and not attractive. Perhaps the tree dedication Ms. Casey spoke of could go in that spot. They could have a local tree contractor remove the Siberian Elm, if the ARPAB agrees after further discussion. He will take a closer look at the Silver Maple, and maybe that could be pushed to next year's budget if it is not a dangerous or hazardous tree. That was \$5,600. That would take a big chunk of money out of the Bartlett Tree budget and would allow the ARPAB to move forward with the inventory of the trees. The only missing piece is that he has not contacted that company that Mr. Grano spoke of, regarding the tags. The website does not have pricing, so they will need to look into this further. He will talk with Mr. Grano before he talks with the company.

Discussion ensued. Chair Bocko asked what the total was that Bartlett Tree had proposed. Mr. Winsor replied \$12,000. He continued that removing \$5,600 brings it down to a reasonable amount. They still have to do the tags eventually. The tree inventory will mean locating, resizing, and tagging each tree with a number, on a little tag about the size of a penny. It will be

up to them (the ARPAB/Friends/City) to add QR codes or whatever labels they want on the trees. He would like to put the trees' names with the QR codes, which would be a little more expensive.

Ms. Carlson stated that she wonders if it would be possible for them (the ARPAB/Friends/City) to measure the trees themselves. Mr. Winsor replied that to be official, it would probably need to be done by a certified person.

Ms. Carlson asked about how much it would cost to have the Siberian Elm taken down. Discussion ensued. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that it is approximately \$1,000 per tree; there is a certain charge per inch with the City contract, but she does not know the actual amount off the top of her head.

Chair Bocko stated that if they keep the rest of the numbers as they are from 2024, they are at about \$14,400. He continued that that is without putting in tags, and without extra money for taking out that tree. Discussion continued. Chair Bocko stated that they are carrying over (some money), but it is more about what the budget amounts will be next year. He wonders about landscaping, replanting, and invasives. Ms. Carlson noted that the \$1,900 needs to be paid (to Mark Johnson's contract), and can be considered gone, leaving about \$1,000 (in that line item). Chair Bocko replied that they need to be at about \$12,500. He asked if the remaining budget for landscaping can be lower, since they are spending this year. Ms. Casey stated that they still wanted to have money in this budget for this fall's leaf mulching. She continued that they have two Mark Johnson charges they are looking at this year. The \$1,900 is for compost. Next fall, they will have to shred leaves again. Others replied maybe not; it depends. Mr. Winsor asked if they are counting on Mark Johnson to supply the compost. Discussion continued. It was noted that they might need more in this budget to get the *correct* compost. For example, from Ideal Compost.

Someone suggested taking a year off from shredding leaves, and just doing it every other year, to save money. Friends members spoke about maybe doing away with the \$500 for invasive treatment this year. Discussion ensued. Friends members agreed that the total would be \$1,000 instead of \$1,500. Chair Bocko asked about the replanting budget, and discussion ensued. Friends members spoke of how early spring is the ideal time for turf removal, with planting in late May or June. They need to order plants. Chair Bocko asked if there is a lower amount they could put in there now, while waiting to hear about grants. He continued that if the grants do not come through, they could then work together to apply for more grants or do something else. Discussion ensued about how if the City could do sod cutting or scrape with a backhoe, it would help. Friends members spoke about a local man who will give them machine time at no cost. Discussion ensued about compost and whether it is part of the landscaping or replanting.

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that the Friends did the cobblestone project as a fundraiser to support enhancements to the park. She asked if there are other ideas for fundraising opportunities beyond grants. Ms. Casey replied that the Friends could reintroduce themselves to the

community and seek donations from people who have supported the park in the past and new people. Discussion continued about how to seek support and donations now for the park's 30th anniversary.

Chair Bocko asked if they have to decide on the budget right now, or if he and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey can fine tune it and bring it back next time. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that she does not think they need to finish it right now. Chair Bocko replied that he and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey will talk. He continued that he thinks they need to look at other funding sources. Ms. Carlson stated that by the end of the month, the Friends will know whether they received the grants or not.

5) Project Tracking

A) Bird Ecology Project

Chair Bocko stated that there is no update; this is in the same place as last month.

B) Master Plan Implementation Discussion

Chair Bocko stated that regarding master plan implementation, that is what they are doing with all these discussions.

Ms. Casey stated that she wants to mention that it is clear in the master plan that the polluted runoff from the Starbucks parking lot is one of the park's biggest ecological problems. Chair Bocko replied that that is something else he and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey can discuss.

6) Upcoming Events

A) Permanent Sign Design/Development

Chair Bocko stated that he and Mr. Winsor talked about this. He continued that there is a subcommittee about the signs, and they will be getting together. Mr. Winsor replied yes, with Nicole (Cullinane). Ms. Fisk-Hennessey asked if there is an anticipated timeframe or date. Mr. Winsor replied not yet.

7) New, Other Business

A) Bartlett Tree Direction (included in Budget Development)

B) Thoughts re: ARPAB Annual Review Document

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that the one-page, double-sided document she had is a review for all the annual events. She continued that Councilor Ed Haas brought it up, for the City Council to have a review of committee minutes or committee initiatives. She asked Councilor Haas to speak about this.

Councilor Haas stated that (the idea is for committees) to put out something to say what they did and what they want to do. He continued that they could think of it as bragging about themselves; it is not an examination. Keep it positive. It is a good advertisement for all the committees and boards and the volunteer activities they do. It will come down from the City sometime in June or July, with a suggested outline for it. The idea is to advertise and highlight all the good work.

Mr. Winsor asked if this is related to the AI-generated document Ms. Fisk-Hennessey showed last time, which came out well. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied yes, that was to give them an idea. She continued that it is a recommendation, not a requirement, for committees to share highlights of their work each year, getting a recap in June and presenting it in July.

Ms. Casey stated that she wants to point out something that the Friends alerted to in the last meeting. She continued that under “Park maintenance and landscaping,” where it says, “invasive species removal,” it should say “in the arboretum,” because invasive species lurking in the huge park are feeding regrowth in the arboretum.

C) ARPAB & FAARP Roles and Responsibilities

Chair Bocko stated that everyone has a paper in front of them about this, and they do not have time to read it now, but he encourages everyone to read it later. He continued that it is important to check in about these things, similar to an annual review, regarding the roles and responsibilities. It also helps to look at the mission statement and purpose. It helps make decisions easier. There is good information in all documents for both the ARPAB and the FAARP. He asked what thoughts people have. He noticed that he cannot find a purpose statement for the Friends. Friends members replied that the Friends do have a mission and vision statement. Chair Bocko replied that it is not in the document he has. Discussion ensued. Ms. Flavin stated that the Friends’ mission statement is *“to provide stewardship, to maintain, develop, and protect the Ashuelot River Park gardens, utilizing funding assistance from the community and environmentally minded groups, and promote sustainable and educational garden practices for the community’s benefit.”* Ms. Fisk-Hennessey asked if they could (send her) that.

Chair Bocko asked for people’s thoughts, noting that the goal is to make sure the two groups are collaborating well and with clarity. Ms. Casey replied that she thought the ARPAB’s (documents) look good. She continued that the Friends’ vision is good; it is more the mechanical things that they need to work out, such as whether they really need incorporators separate from the board of directors. They do not have enough bodies and enough distinct roles, but they want to leave room, when they revise their rules of procedure, to become a slightly bigger organization that is getting more in the way of donations. It would be good to preserve the idea of the board of directors as separate from the Friends, and the Friends as the larger underlying body that does things like appoint board members.

Mr. Winsor stated that he applauds the idea of donations. He continued that he wonders if the cobblestone idea has run its course. Ms. Casey replied that she is not the one to ask. Discussion ensued about the cobbles, regarding the amount of them, their locations, sizes, and costs.

Chair Bocko asked if the Friends or others have questions about the ARPAB stuff. He continued that the (roles and responsibilities) were created by the City. The purpose is clear, and “advisory” is a key word.

Ms. Casey left at 9:15 AM.

Mr. Winsor stated that he agrees that the ARPAB’s charge is clear. He continued that he thinks the support from the Parks & Recreation Department through the years has been outstanding.

Chair Bocko stated that they will keep this as an agenda item, not forever, but for a while. He continued that as people read things and the information percolates, they might have more to say.

Chair Bocko asked if any of the visitors wanted to speak. Amy stated that she is a Keene resident, and does work with the Ashuelot River Clean-Up. She was wondering what was happening on the local level.

Ms. Krautmann asked if Mr. Hamm is working on Russell Park. Mr. Hamm replied yes. Ms. Krautmann stated that she has been thinking about working with them somehow on the Russell Park, to maybe combine efforts in some way. She continued that a fundraiser she had thought about for the City is a Volksmarch. She looked into it years ago. The City has to apply to become a member. Then they could host something like that once a year.

Mr. Winsor asked what that is. Ms. Krautmann replied that Exeter, NH has done it. She continued that it is a place where people pay to walk around the city, on a path, and visit parks. It means a lot of traffic in the parks. It is a way for entities to combine work and efforts. A path was designed years ago for the Wellness Program at the high school. This is done in Germany, too. Usually it is a 5k or 10k walk. Participants get a little pin to show that they accomplished it.

Chair Bocko stated that this would be a way to highlight and publicize the City’s green treasures and raise some money. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that “vibrant neighborhoods” and “connected mobility” are components of the master plan. Discussion continued. Ms. Krautmann stated that the City would have to apply to become a member, and she does not know if Volksmarch is what it is called in the United States. Chair Bocko asked if Ms. Krautmann knows someone in Exeter who has done this. Ms. Krautmann replied no, they probably would need to contact someone in Parks & Rec (in Exeter). Chair Bocko asked if that would be a good action step Ms. Fisk-Hennessey could take.

Chair Bocko stated that in the late 1990s, he worked with a Symonds School class to make a treasure hunt at Ashuelot River Park. He continued that it is still there. Beyond just creating a

path to a park, they could do something like that. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied yes, there is letterboxing, geocaching, and other such activities that do not impede or harm the beauty. Discussion ensued. Chair Bockko stated that this can be a New Business item for next time.

8) Adjourn – Next Meeting Tuesday, April 8, 2025 at 8:15 AM

There being no further business, Chair Bockko adjourned the meeting at 9:23 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Carrah Fisk-Hennessey, Staff, April 1, 2025