

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, April 8, 2025

8:15 AM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Paul Bocko, Chair
Leslie Casey (arrived at 8:21 AM)
Dian Mathews
Kelly Cook
Arthur Winsor, Alternate
Thomas Haynes, Alternate

Staff Present:

Carrah Fisk-Hennessey, Director of Parks,
Recreation

Members Not Present:

Suzy Krautmann, Vice Chair

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Bocko called the meeting to order at 8:18 AM.

Guests present: Raynee Carlson and Karen Flavin of the Friends of Ashuelot River Park Arboretum, & Steve Hooper, former Board member.

2) Approval of February 11, 2025 Minutes

Revision: Line 35, Dorothy's last name should be spelled "Arwe."

A motion by Ms. Cook to adopt the February 11, 2025 minutes, as amended, was duly seconded by Ms. Casey and the motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Cook referred to a question about a comment on line 18 of the January 2025 minutes about mussels, noting that it sounded like something she said. [*The City Clerk's office made the edit accordingly*]

3) Report from Friends of Ashuelot River Park Arboretum
A) Grant Work
B) Pollinator Garden Establishment

Ms. Mathews provided the following report on behalf of the Friends of Ashuelot River Park Arboretum:

- Despite a past note in the minutes about needing to be on the same page when people would come to do certain work on the park, someone needed to speak with Monadnock Garden Club. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey said she would research to find a contact.
- Funding – In addition to a \$1,000 Grant from Mascoma Bank, the Friends also received \$300 from C&S Wholesale Grocers and \$200 from the Church Ladies on the Square, two of whom are former Friends.
- Cobblestones – Once all of the existing pamphlets are gone, the Friends would update the form with their new address. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey confirmed that they could leave some at the Parks & Recreation Office.
- Pollinator Garden – Concentrating on this and not pursuing the Rain Garden at this time. On April 1, all the sod was removed from the Pollinator Garden. The Friends were going to attempt laying landscaping fabric on April 10.
- Hantavirus – Discussed this rare but deadly virus that anyone should be aware of in the shed when dealing with mouse excrement. You have to spray it with bleach, leave it for a while, and go back in with masks to clean up. She urged caution.
- Monadnock Conservancy's new Chair – Amanda Littleton from the Cheshire County Conservation District (and Antioch University New England graduate).
- Friends' Pruning Workshop – April 7, attended by 20 in the wet weather. A landscaping firm came from Nashua. Ms. Mathews thanked Ms. Fisk-Hennessey for sending an advertisement to the radio stations, the Sentinel, and the Shopper News.
- Antioch Workday in the Park – April 23.
- Pollinator Palooza – June 24. The Friends and Parks Department will be there.

Ms. Casey reported that Jen Roberts was tasked with the Friends' digital marketing effort but had not been in communication all month since agreeing. Ms. Casey said she would try to follow-up and the Friends would decide whether to reach out to others. They were disappointed because they hoped to have the Charity Navigator Profile by Pollinator Palooza, which could be a great donation opportunity.

Discussion ensued as the Board reviewed photos of the poor-quality compost—full of pinecones and big sticks. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey said she wanted to gather feedback. Chair Bocko thought this had happened before. Ms. Flavin said she was in touch with Ideal Compost for the Pollinator Garden, but this was not the same. Mr. Winsor thought the intent was just to shred leaves. Ms. Mathews said originally, the compost applicator was supposed to take the leaves off, put compost down, and put leaves back on top; however, the decision was that was too complicated, but she was unsure anyone spoke to him after that. Ms. Mathews said Mr. Johnson said he would bring compost if it could be dug up/unfrozen. Chair Bocko asked the action step. Ms. Fisk-

Hennessey said she would collect feedback, ask to meet with Mr. Johnson, and move forward from there.

Chair Bocko asked what the friends would be using the \$1,300 for (?) Ms. Mathews said plantings and mulch for the Pollinator Garden. Ms. Carlson added that the funds were specifically secured for this purpose, as the new class of Master Gardeners final project, so they had to be used for this purpose

4) Finance Report

A) Budget Development

Chair Bocko led the Committee in budget development. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey explained that the Board could bring up to \$12,000 from the Trust, which was more than she thought previously (vs. \$8,500–\$9,000). In total, she thought the Board was working with approximately \$14,500, which Chair Bocko noted was how much the Board actually spent in 2024.

Discussion ensued about Bartlett Tree costs. Mr. Winsor worked on pairing down the proposal with Frank Grano from Bartlett. Mr. Grano thought the Siberian elm Mr. Winsor labeled for removal was very valuable. Mr. Winsor said he wanted to have more of a conversation about it, stating that pruning and cabling it as Bartlett suggested might be right to save money, citing degrees of invasiveness; he said Siberian elm is labeled invasive but is not invasive like a Norway maple, for example. Mr. Winsor thought there should be more conversation with Mr. Grano in person before cutting any trees. Ms. Casey said Siberian elms were the biggest problem along the fence lines, especially ones that had not been cut for 25 years; she emphasized the weeds were cut repeatedly but not the roots. If indeed Siberian elms, Mr. Winsor said it would be important to show Mr. Grano. Mr. Winsor also suggested that the silver maple should be made safe. Ultimately, Mr. Winsor suggested waiting to sign the Bartlett Tree contract until Mr. Grano could visit the park with members of the Board to ensure the correct trees would be cut. Ms. Mathews said Friends could attend too. Chair Bocko asked if the silver maple should come down immediately. Mr. Winsor did not think it was immediate this year, but he cited one falling down on the Keene State College quad because the cable broke that could have been disastrous to illustrate the need to make it safe.

Discussion continued about the Bartlett Tree quote, which was \$12,000. That was \$2,000 more than the year before. Mr. Winsor and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey commented on the re-inventory costing approximately \$6,000. Ms. Carlson said the Siberian elm was a large portion of the \$12,000. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey offered to go to the Park with Mr. Winsor and Mr. Grano; she would inform Mr. Grano the Board is holding the contract until then. Discussion continued on the new estimate, with the notion that excluding either the Siberian elm or silver maple this year in order to get the Bartlett quote under \$10,000 for the year. Mr. Winsor confirmed that quote would not include a new inventory or new tags on the trees.

With that in mind, Chair Bocko proposed the following for discussion and all were in agreement:

- Landscaping: \$4,000
- Replanting: \$500
- Bartlett: \$9,000
- Invasive treatment: \$1,000

Discussion ensued as Ms. Carlson had questions about what the \$4,000 landscaping budget and the quality of the leaf mulching last year. She felt some was very thick and she had to clear off huge piles. Ms. Flavin thought the compost was not screened.

A motion by Ms. Mathews to accept the budget as presented was duly seconded by Ms. Cook at the motion carried unanimously.

- Landscaping: \$4,000
- Replanting: \$500
- Bartlett: \$9,000
- Invasive Treatment: \$1,000

5) Project Tracking

A) Bird Ecology Project Updates – Steve Hooper & Thomas Haynes

Chair Bocko welcomed former Board member, Steve Hooper of Keene, who had led the effort to erect bird houses in the Park. Mr. Hooper thanked Mr. Haynes for helping to design and build the two bird houses (songbirds) and one duck house. Mr. Hooper also thanked Tippin Rock Mill for creating the posts (4" x 4") for the houses that would be sturdy from windstorms and elements; he thanked the City for paying for higher quality wood. He said the next step would be to choose sites in the Park for the houses, stating his idea to involve the Antioch Bird Club (ABC) as a mini volunteer project to install them. If hardware supplied and the City were to dig the holes, Mr. Hooper would be happy to help and supervise the installation. He said the birds would start looking to nest in April and May. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey wondered if that could align with the Antioch Workday in the Park on April 23. Mr. Hooper thought that was a wonderful idea. Chair Bocko offered to talk to ABC. Since this Bird Ecology project was organized by an Antioch student, he said it would be great to have this implemented by Antioch students. Chair Bocko would look back at the original student's work to see if any bird house locations were identified.

B) Master Plan Implementation Discussion

Chair Bocko thought that the next meeting might be a good time to revisit the Master Plan list.

Ms. Casey did not want to lose sight of the runoff issue from the Starbucks parking lot, stating that there was a page worth of references supporting addressing the runoff. She did not think it was fair for the Friends to take responsibility for a commercial property running pollution off a 45-year-old parking lot. With water pollution regulated at the state level, she thought anyone could report it to the NH Department of Environmental Services at any time. She said the Friends felt the City should take a role in it. Ms. Casey would forward her written summary to

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey. Mr. Winsor asked if it was a Conservation Commission issue. Mr. Haynes—Conservation Commission representative on the Board—said sometimes projects come before the Commission before they are built for issues of water flowage. Ms. Mathews suggested forming a subcommittee to review past mitigation plans when the Starbucks parking lot was built since it was identified as an issue in the Master Plan. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey said she could communicate with the Public Works Department to see what the original plans were and if there were any stormwater mitigation aspects. Ms. Carlson talked about the curb cuts, stating that it seemed like something that was planned by the City for access to the Park. Discussion continued on how much was unknown and how much had changed over decades—standards and ownership.

Ms. Mathews offered to organize the subcommittee and Chair Bocko agreed to meet with her. Ms. Casey asked if there should be a representative from the Conservation Commission. Mr. Haynes said the Commission does not actively enforce things but advises and recommends to the Planning Board; it is the City's job to enforce. However, he mentioned water experts on the Commission, like Councilor Andrew Madison. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey was willing to meet with the subcommittee too.

C) Permanent Sign Design/Development

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey reported no updates, but Mr. Winsor said he was trying to set something up with Nicole Cullinane to have a graphic developed.

6) Upcoming Events

- Antioch Workday: April 23
- Pollinator Palooza: June 24
- Monadnock Conservancy Groundbreaking Ceremony: June 26 at 9:00 AM
 - Mr. Winsor was appointed to the Conservancy and said it would be a great partner to the Park.
- Art in the Park: September 2025

Ms. Carlson asked about sections of the Park that would be the City's and how the Monadnock Conservancy land ties into the park space, noting that she was trying to understand the Japanese knotweed. Mr. Bocko said that it was a few years down the line and cycles of funding. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey said she would bring better plans to the next meeting so everyone could have a better understanding.

7) New, Other Business

A) Volksmarch?

Vice Chair Krautmann was not present to address Volksmarch.

Chair Bocko mentioned a Quest (letterbox) in ARP; it is the box behind the shed that has been repeatedly vandalized. Chair Bocko manages six in Keene through the Horatio Colony Trust. Ms. Mathews said it would be fun to have one in the Rachel Marshall area and Chair Bocko noted that the original ARP Quest extends to that side but there could be a separate one too.

Chair Bocko reported that he contacted Rich Holschuh of the Brattleboro-Wantastiquet Abenaki Tribe who was willing to work with the Board, but Chair Bocko could not remember the date.

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

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

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker
April 14, 2025

Reviewed and edited by,
Carrah Fisk-Hennessey, Parks & Recreation Director