

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, May 19, 2025

5:00 PM

**2nd Floor Conference Room,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Councilor Andrew Madison, Chair
Councilor Robert Williams, Vice Chair
Art Walker
Steven Bill
Barbara Richter
Katie Kinsella
Bob Milliken, Alternate
Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Alternate
Ken Bergman, Alternate
Thomas Haynes, Alternate (Voting)
John Therriault, Alternate

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner

Members Not Present:

Gary Flaherty

1) Call to Order

Chair Madison called the meeting to order at 5:09 PM.

2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – April 21, 2025

Revisions:

1. Lines 328–333, Mr. Bergman requested slight revisions to his language represented as, “Mr. Bergman mentioned visiting Airport Director, David Hickling, who expressed frustration that although the Environmental Impact Report prepared by McFarland Johnson after its Environmental Survey in Fall 2024 adopted a broad view of the Environmental Impact of a wildlife control fence, one reviewer from NH Fish & Game recommended a narrower view that would require placing the fence along Airport Road, which Mr. Hickling, this Commission, and the public did not want. Mr. Hickling was awaiting a decision but had not yet received one.”
2. Lines 339–340, change the word “and” to “but,” and the word “buying” to “funding.”
3. Line 408, change “Stilwell Farms” to “Stonewall Farm.”

A motion by Vice Chair Williams to adopt the April 21, 2025 minutes as amended was duly seconded by Mr. Walker and the motion carried unanimously.

3) Report-Outs:

A) Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Subcommittee

Mr. Haynes reported that the Subcommittee met on Friday, May 9, and he reviewed their updates. First, on maps and signage, he said they hoped to determine funding at some point to replace the smaller maps with larger metal maps on four of the major trailheads. The Subcommittee continued putting-up signs along the trails as well.

Mr. Haynes recalled the April meeting (he was not present), when the Commission had a lengthy discussion about the issues of new, unauthorized bike trails. Mr. Haynes stated it was not really an issue, although the Subcommittee saw some new trails in the Forest. He said the Subcommittee was working with the New England Mountain Bike Association (NEMBA) and stated that placing new signage did not feel necessary. The Subcommittee knew who was creating some of the unauthorized trails and was working with them. Instead of signage, the Subcommittee would develop recommendations so that anyone else interested in proposing a new bike trail would have those to follow and be good stewards of future trails. Ms. Richter asked if the Subcommittee could share those recommendations with the City, as there was a lot of discussion of needing help with the unauthorized bike trails at Robin Hood Park/Beech Hill. Mr. Haynes said the guidelines were in progress and Mr. Walker added the Director of Parks and Recreation, Carrah Fisk-Hennessey, was aware other areas were having the same problem and would be in touch with her peers at those other agencies about options. Mr. Bill noted the Subcommittee's idea for those interested in building new bike trails to appear before a committee to seek permission. He said part of the problem was it being one of many uncontrollable/unenforceable activities in the Forest, like building fires and swimming. Ms. Richter was glad to know the Subcommittee was working on the dilemma and said the guidelines would be helpful to share.

Next, Mr. Haynes shared that the Subcommittee established its summer 2025 trail work schedule, with volunteer workdays in the Park the first Saturday of each month and normal Subcommittee meetings the second Friday of each month. He said to hopefully anticipate additional workdays announced by email list. Mr. Haynes also reported that the Subcommittee continued its spring trail maintenance, and the water bars and bridge work from 2024 seemed to be doing well despite the amount of water this spring.

Regarding outreach, Mr. Haynes recalled the Commission approving an honorarium for Steven Lamonde for a bird walk, which would not be occurring, but he thanked the Commission for the approval. Instead, via the Parks and Recreation Department, Mr. Haynes would lead a youth group doing trail work at the end of June.

Also on trails, he recalled in 2024 when the City acquired the parcel of land by the water tower bordering Old Gilsum Road. He noted an old logging road roughly through the middle of the parcel that volunteers would work to make more usable on Saturday workdays, creating connectors to the already established trails so the parcel will have better walking and biking access.

Next, Mr. Haynes reported on the Subcommittee's work to create a bridge at the spillway. The group was awaiting engineered plans (end of May), which would be sent to a City Council Standing Committee before being approved by City Council (hopefully by end of June). Once approved, the Subcommittee could start community fundraising to cover costs of the bridge. Mr. Haynes said the process was taking longer than some anticipated. Vice Chair Williams warned of the Council's summer vacation in August, noting it could delay the approval process. Mr. Haynes said it was in the City Engineer's hands and there was nothing the Subcommittee could do until the Engineer's parts were completed. Chair Madison anticipated it would be forwarded to the Municipal Services, Facilities & Infrastructure Standing Committee, which only meets once monthly before sending matters back to Council. Mr. Haynes said the Subcommittee was trying to be patient, acknowledging the Engineering Division had a lot going on.

B) Invasive Plant Species

Vice Chair Williams reported that the first invasive species removal event of the season would be immediately following this meeting at 6:30 PM at the Stone Arch Bridge along Court Street, where the Commission had worked to remove invasives for the previous three years. While there were still invasives to address, it was getting better thanks to this effort. Vice Chair Williams had acquired some ferns to replace some of the invasives.

Next, Vice Chair Williams shared the schedule for upcoming invasive species removal events (often on Monday holidays when people are off work/school, or in the evenings):

- Monday, June 16, 6:30 PM at Ellis Harrison Park, clearing knotweed where the Commission had been making progress for the previous few years.
- Monday, August 25, 6:30 PM at Woodland Cemetery
- Monday, October 13, 5:00 PM at Robin Hood Park
- Tuesday, November 11, 4:00/4:30 PM on the Rail Trail

He noted the empty slots in the schedule because July, for example, would typically be quite hot; if anyone found an additional opportunity, however, Vice Chair Williams was willing to schedule something. Mr. Bill asked if there was any progress on the City establishing a more formal program to address invasive species. Vice Chair Williams said he heard the City Council's Municipal Services, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee would receive an update but had not yet.

C) Land Conservation/Easement Monitoring

Mr. Bergman mentioned a few weeks before this meeting, running into former Commissioner, Deb LeBlanc, who needed to return the easement monitoring binders to the Community Development Department. Ms. Brunner said she had not received them yet, noting she emailed Ms. LeBlanc a few times about them after she resigned from the Commission. Ms. Brunner knew there was other loose information in the Community Development Department, but Mr. Von Plinsky said Ms. LeBlanc had the more site-specific binders that would be most useful, and Ms. Brunner agreed. Ms. Richter said she would reach out to Ms. LeBlanc directly.

D) Pollinator Updates

Mr. Therriault reported that May 20 was World bee Day as proclaimed by the United Nations. The Xerces Society—Sponsor of Bee City USA—invited Mr. Therriault to a webinar on ground nesting bees, which was open to everyone, and he forwarded the invitation to Ms. Brunner. These unmanaged, typically solitary native bees make up the largest percentage of the bee population in general; only the queen survives the winter and starts a new nest the next year. Mr. Haynes asked if they typically stay in the same hole, but Mr. Therriault was unsure, encouraging Mr. Haynes to attend the webinar. Mr. Haynes noted he would be stung mowing his yard but not always from the same holes. Mr. Therriault said they like bare ground because grass is a barrier. Bumblebees he learned, for example, like abandoned mouse nests because of the downy fur material that is available efficiently.

Mr. Therriault also shared Pollinator Week 2025: June 16–22. He noted the Xerces Society had a sample proclamation in case the City wanted to declare its commitment, and Chair Madison said he would share it with the Mayor. Mr. Therriault noted all the City activities for Pollinator Week, including Pollinator Pallooza at Ashuelot River Park on Tuesday, June 24, with 8–10 organizations, farms, nurseries, and educational organizations about pollinators for kids. Chair Madison asked Ms. Brunner to ensure Pollinator Pallooza (organized by Cheshire County Conservation District) would be included in the Mayor’s Proclamation on Pollinator Week. Mr. Therriault mentioned that while he had seen signs around town for No Mow May, it would not work if one’s lawn was only grass; wildflowers would be needed to have a benefit for the pollinators.

Vice Chair Williams mentioned the City recently acquiring a small strip of land along the corner of Beaver Street and Damon Court that would not have much use but might be good for pollinators. He suggested that Mr. Therriault scout it for pollinator opportunities.

4) Discussion Items

A) Master Plan Update

Ms. Brunner reported on the Master Plan Update, which she said was in the final sprint, focused on staff reviewing the draft Plan, incorporating edits, and sending the draft to the Steering

Committee for review. The draft Plan would be revealed to the public at the June 3 Future Summit, which Ms. Brunner hoped the whole Commission could attend from 5:00–7:00 PM at the Keene Public Library, Heberton Hall; with food, childcare for potty trained kids, and a raffle, the event would feel like a celebration. Then, on June 10, the Master Plan Steering Committee would discuss the draft Plan for the first time and may or may not be prepared to vote to recommend its adoption to City Council that night.

B) Outreach

Mr. Bill recalled the Commission wanting to tour Keene's Wastewater Treatment Plant. He called to seek information but had not received a call back yet. If the Commission was still interested, he would continue pursuing the opportunity, noting the Plant closes at 3:00 PM, so the group would have to plan accordingly. He thought the Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee (ARLAC) might be interested too. Chair Madison said he would meet with ARLAC on May 20 and inquire. Mr. Bergman also recalled the Commission's long-term goal to visit Keene's water source in Roxbury, and he hoped that could still happen with the Public Works Department's help. Chair Madison said he would follow up.

C) Budget

Chair Madison asked how much remained in the Commission's Budget. Ms. Brunner reported that to date, the Commission had approved \$950 to the NH Association of Conservation Commissions and \$200 in annual dues to Bee City USA. The honorarium for Steven Lamonde did not happen as planned. So, there was \$850 remaining of the Commission's \$2,000 fiscal year Budget.

i) *Annual ARLAC Request*

Ms. Brunner said the Commission had not yet received the normal annual request from the Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee (ARLAC) for E. coli monitoring of the Ashuelot River, but she recalled the Commission typically donating \$150. Chair Madison noted a conflict-of-interest because he was a member of ARLAC and recused himself from this Budget consideration.

Mr. Haynes made the following motion, which was duly seconded by Mr. Bill. On a vote of 7–0, the Conservation Commission approved donating \$150.00 to the Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee. Chair Madison abstained.

ii) *CCCD Farm Camp*

Chair Madison recalled this camp encourages kids to get involved with agriculture and the Cheshire County Conservation District (CCCD) was seeking a \$250 donation. Vice Chair Williams wanted to be transparent that the original request was made in March, and the

Commission had pushed its Budget discussion a few months since, and now the CCCD's request had closed for 2025. So, this donation would be applied to the 2026 Camps. Vice Chair Williams also recalled this donation would be for the whole District of Cheshire County, but almost all kids using the scholarships were Keene residents, so the money would remain local.

It was confirmed there would be no issue for next year's Budget. The Commission's Budget does not roll over; it returns to the General Fund at the end of the fiscal year if unused.

Mr. Walker made the following motion, which was duly seconded by Vice Chair Williams. On a vote of 8–0, the Conservation Commission approved donating \$250.00 to the Cheshire County Conservation District Farm Camp.

iii) *Materials for Invasive Plant Species Programs*

Discussion ensued about Vice Chair Williams' needs for invasive plant removal and replacement, as anything unused from the Commission's Budget would return to the General Fund at the end of the fiscal year. There was \$450 remaining, and Vice Chair Williams was unsure if that was too much to spend on replacement plants. Mr. Therriault wondered if he needed other materials, like tarps. Vice Chair Williams said yes, as well as things like pole diggers, which are not cheap.

Chair Madison suggested using the remaining funds to buy items to establish the long-term invasive species removal program, noting it was now in its 4th/5th established year. Largely run by volunteers with their own hands, gloves, and tools. The Chair thought it would be reasonable for the Commission to buy gloves, bags, durable tools, tarps, and other equipment to sustain this program for success through future summers. Vice Chair Williams agreed things like gloves would certainly be welcome. The Chair thought investing in the program this way might garner more involvement.

Further discussion ensued on where these tools/materials would be stored and in whose custody. Chair Madison suggested the Parks Department so they would be available in case a neighborhood group wanted to work in a park, for example. Ms. Brunner suggested incorporating it with the existing Seed & Tool Lending Library at the Keene Public Library. Mr. Bill mentioned experiences with trail work that became problematic accessing tools through a particular department, so he thought the Lending Library might be a solution. Given the Library's experience lending tools vs. the Public Works Department, for example, Chair Madison thought it worth investigating how to partner with the Library in this way (e.g., ensuring scheduled invasive species workdays would be blocked out for availability, and an individual inventory for the Commissions items). Vice Chair Williams would discuss it as a member of the Library Board of Trustees as well. Chair Madison was comfortable leaving the discretion of what tools and equipment to purchase to Vice Chair Williams. The Commission agreed to approve this final expense at the June meeting, pending any other final requests/needs arising in the upcoming month.

Discussion ensued about whether Vice Chair Williams would want the funds to be used only for tools or for some plants as well. He said yes, approximately \$100 for plants would be ideal too, and it would be nice to make those purchase earlier in the season.

Mr. Bill made the following motion, which was duly seconded by Ms. Richter. On a vote of 8–0, the Conservation Commission approved allocating \$100.00 to Vice Chair Williams to spend on plants for invasive species replacement in the City.

D) Potential Land Acquisition - 0 Old Gilsum Road, TMP# 218-015-000

Mr. Haynes discussed the email Ms. Brunner shared about the property at 0 Gilsum Road that borders the parcel the City purchased in spring 2024. Mr. Haynes thought the City should acquire this property. Ms. Brunner displayed a map, and Mr. Haynes oriented the Commission with this 0.75-acre parcel at the end of Old Gilsum Road. It seemed this would be another parcel unlikely to be developed in the context of the surrounding properties, smaller acreages, and rights-of-ways. Mr. Haynes said the parcel went on the market approximately two weeks before this meeting, and he thought the City could likely acquire it for a reasonable price with the Conservation Land Acquisition Fund. He was unsure if it had been purchased in that time since.

Vice Chair Williams recalled legislation in NH this year that would make it much easier to build on Class VI Roads such as Old Gilsum Road, so he thought that was an extra reason to pursue this. Chair Madison agreed there were currently many efforts at the State House to restrict towns and cities' abilities to regulate land use at the local level.

Chair Madison thought the best course of action was to refer this to the City Manager, Elizabeth Ferland. Ms. Brunner agreed that if the Commission wanted to recommend using the Conservation Land Acquisition Fund, it would need to hold a Public Hearing, and there was not enough time in advance of this meeting to notice a Hearing (10 days' notice required for a real estate acquisition). Chair Madison asked to hold a Public Hearing at the next Commission meeting. Ms. Brunner would check the remaining balance in the Conservation Land Acquisition Fund (she believed it was over \$100,000). Then, Chair Madison explained the City Council would vote on whether to approve the City Manager negotiating and executing a real estate deal, which would occur during a non-public session of the City Council. Conversely, because of two Commissioners on the City Council, Ms. Brunner suggested holding a Joint Public Workshop of the City Council–Conservation Commission, which two other Commissioners would need to attend to form a quorum of four members; then, the Council would have its own non-public session to vote on the purchase. She mentioned the alternative for the Commission to have its Public Hearing and own non-public session, which she was advised it should do more often. Chair Madison thought a Joint City Council–Conservation Commission Public Workshop would be the best course of action. Ms. Brunner agreed with a suggestion that the Commission would first need to vote to approve the property purchase in a non-public session following a noticed Public Hearing

Mr. Haynes wondered if waiting one month would be acting soon enough. Vice Chair Williams said he looked at the website and there were several similar properties for sale and barring quick moving by the City of Concord, he did not think so, as the properties had been available for two decades. He thought the Commission could probably feel comfortable waiting, especially given the prices. Chair Madison added the real estate frenzy from the pandemic with mass amounts of people from out-of-state buying local properties had largely slowed down. Since these were not houses and were undevelopable lots, he did not think there was as much concern, and there was nothing the Commission could do without a Public Hearing regardless. Discussion ensued briefly as the Commission reviewed the surrounding parcels on the map for further context. Mr. Haynes pointed out this parcel would be contiguous with the City's Goose Pond Forest parcels. Discussion ensued about the surrounding three tax map parcels for sale and perhaps the need to research them as well.

Ms. Brunner would communicate with the City Manager, schedule the Joint Public Workshop, and check how the adjacent parcel was acquired in 2024.

5) New or Other Business

Mr. Haynes reported that at the Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Subcommittee meeting, a member mentioned the solar project proposed on Old Gilsum Road's work lapsed and he asked if that was true and for other updates. Chair Madison said yes, and the project died; it sounded like they wanted to do something they were unable to make happen, so they moved on. Chair Madison said their Conditional Use Permit CUP expired and if it came up again, the Commission would discuss it, but otherwise he removed it from the agenda after 18 months with no updates. Ms. Brunner agreed they had two Variances that expired at the beginning of May 2025.

Mr. Bergman recalled the Commission conducting a site visit for a proposed development on Whitcomb's Mill Road for a wetlands referral. He said the applicant died but the wife still owned the property and asked the status of the permits there. Ms. Brunner replied the applicant submitted an extension request just in time. It sounded like the same contractor, Mike Pappas, who purchased the old Cobblestone building site and other properties that had been in a similar holding pattern bought it, so Ms. Brunner was unsure how quickly they would be developed. Mr. Bergman continued, mentioning other past projects the Commission had reviewed, pointing out that the Cottage Court tree clearing on Court Street commenced and the new dam beneath Wilson Pond at the High School is an amazing structure. The new dam is slightly lower than the original and will overtop earlier and stay overtopped longer, backing water up to the Country Club; brief discussion ensued as Mr. Bergman and Mr. Therriault described the benefits of the Country Club fairways for absorbing flood waters.

On a related note, Mr. Bergman mentioned that water at the Dillant-Hopkins Airport usually comes from Wilson Pond and Swanzeey under Route 32 & Old Homestead Hwy into the marsh and drains under the road and into the swamp, then to the Ashuelot River. He said the Ashuelot

River had been so high and beavers so busy at the Airport that water was flowing backward from the River and the swamp was very flooded. So, beavers had to be actively trapped at the Airport for some time; they get into culverts and cause all kinds of issues. So, the City retained a pair of trappers. The water levels got so high that for some time the traps could not even be secured.

Mr. Bill referred to the Court Street development and questioned how much was based on modeling, asking if there was any truth that after five inches of rain in a half day, someone goes and studies the discharges to compare to the models; how well would the City know the models are working? Chair Madison said he did not have an answer. Mr. Bill stated it would become really critical, noting a lot of the Commission's decisions were based on how well applicants' models work. He wondered if someone from an engineering company could come explain to the Commission how they ground truth these models, because it felt like an idle exercise to him otherwise. Ms. Richter asked if he was talking about stormwater basins and Ms. Brunner said the hydroCAD models for stormwater management design. So, Ms. Richter said they should be testing soil samples to determine rate of infiltration. Mr. Bill also questioned spacing on those things, stating the Commission did not have good idea of those.

6) Adjournment – Next Meeting Date: Monday June 16, 2025

There being no further business, Chair Madison adjourned the meeting at 6:12 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katryna Kibler, Minute Taker
May 26, 2025

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner