

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, May 13, 2025

8:15 AM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Paul Bocko, Chair
Suzy Krautmann, Vice Chair
Leslie Casey
Dian Mathews
Kelly Cook
Thomas Haynes, Alternate

Staff Present:

Carrah Fisk-Hennessey, Director of Parks,
Recreation

Members Not Present:

Arthur Winsor, Alternate

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Bocko called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM. Roll call was conducted.

2) Approval of April 8, 2025 Minutes

ARPAB members noted the following corrections to the April 8, 2025 meeting minutes:

Lines 57 and 58 – Ms. Casey was the speaker, not Ms. Cook.

Line 19 – The correct spelling is Arwe.

Line 94 – The minutes read, “Ms. Casey said Siberian elms were the biggest problem along the fence lines, especially ones that had not been cut for 25 years.” Ms. Casey stated that her point was that the weeds *do* get cut repeatedly, but the *roots* do not get removed.

Line 204 – Rich’s last name is spelled Holschuh.

Ms. Krautmann made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of April 8, 2025, as amended.

Ms. Mathews seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Report from Friends of Ashuelot River Park Arboretum

Ms. Mathews stated that the Friends board realized they have 13 master gardeners plus some other people, which meant operating as a board and having Friends for the first time ever. She

continued that however, when it comes down to actually doing the work, the board discovered that those 13 master gardeners and others are apparently too busy.

Discussion ensued. Ms. Mathews stated that she has a map of the Arboretum, and they will go bed by bed around the five acres, determining what they can do this summer. They will write it on the map and give it to everyone, so that when the (Friends/volunteers) come, they have an idea of what to do. They have not decided what to do about the shed yet; they have to work something out with that. Most people bring their own tools.

Ms. Mathews continued that the Pollinator Garden is coming along well. She gave information about the plants there. She continued that they will fill in the trenches in the rain garden, because the trenches are not functioning. Regarding bed maintenance, the Friends' board is (dissatisfied with) what the contracted landscaper did (with the compost). There are thousands of pinecones and pieces of sticks and branches that the Friends must clean up, which is more work.

Chair Bocko stated that sometime in the last couple of years, they had a bad compost or mulch experience. He continued that he checked past meeting minutes. He asked Ms. Mathews if this same contracted landscaper was the one who brought the mulch or compost that did not work for them in the past. Ms. Mathews replied no, that was from the City. She continued that it was more loads than the Friends board members could handle, and full of pieces of tar, rocks, glass, and large leaf clumps. It was awful for the Friends board. The contracted landscaper had been doing things at the park. A different company was doing the vacuuming of the beds in the fall, when the vacuuming was being done. She does not think they had any other compost delivered besides that.

Chair Bocko thanked Ms. Mathews for the history. He continued that he had wanted to see if the same contractor was responsible for both incidents, but it sounds like no, one was City folk. Discussion continued. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that she called the contractor, and he has not returned her phone call, so she will call him again. She continued that she is holding the invoice until they have a conversation about the quality of the compost.

Ms. Mathews stated that while they are on the topic of compost, an idea that was floated years ago was to do a section each year, such as the West St. bed, the Starbucks bed, and the back bed. By now, they would have had only one bed to go. They would have been almost done. After 30 years of having things not done and then vacuumed completely, all the little mycelium were right up on the surface. They put some stuff down, but not enough. The trees need it.

Chair Bocko stated that once they clear things up with the contractor, when they know who they will have bring (compost or mulch), he thinks one of the Friends board members will need to meet that person there to (inspect) the material before it goes out. Ms. Mathews agreed, and discussion continued.

Ms. Mathews stated that this is the third year of knotweed by the river. It is working well. They will have to weed, of course, but it is looking good. She gave more information about the knotweed situation. Discussion ensued. Ms. Mathews stated that she does not know who the people are who come to cut, or when they come, but there are certain flowers the Friends want to make sure are not cut. Maybe they could have a tag system, so they know what not to cut.

Ms. Mathews continued that the Friends are getting ready for Pollinator Palooza, Tuesday, June 24. It should be fun.

Chair Bocko asked if there were questions. Someone asked about the Friends Facebook page. Ms. Mathews replied that she has not done it. She continued that she will report on that once she has something to report.

Karen Flavin, Friends Board member, noted that the Pollinator Palooza will be from 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM, and hopefully they will have things planted by then. Ms. Cook asked if the Friends want help with the planting. Ms. Flavin replied yes, and discussion ensued.

4) Finance Report

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that she will meet with the Board of Trustees next Wednesday with a proposal. She continued that the Trustees are in charge of the ARPAB's funding. When they were talking earlier, the proposal was going to be \$14,000 by moving the carryover. She is proposing \$14,500 without the carryover. That is why the number is larger than anticipated. She put an asterisk next to the landscaping piece because the conversation has been started with the contractor about their concerns. Thus, they do not know what that amount looks like yet.

Chair Bocko asked if Ms. Fisk-Hennessey will present this to the Trustees. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied yes. Brief discussion continued.

Ms. Mathews asked if Mr. Winsor has already walked around with Frank (Grano). Chair Bocko replied that he does not think so, that is in process. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that she asked Bartlett Tree to come in with a number between \$9,000 and \$10,000 and that email arrived just minutes before this meeting, which she has not had time to review yet. The figure, says Mr. Grano, does not include the re-inventorying and tagging. Regarding the Siberian elm Mr. Winsor mentioned, apparently it was rootstock for a different kind of elm, and it grew wildly. They will be taking the Siberian elm. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey asked how the ARPAB wants to handle this proposal from Bartlett Tree, given that they probably cannot digest it all in a few minutes (here in the meeting). Brief discussion ensued.

5) Project Tracking

A) Bird Ecology Project

Chair Bocko stated that they had the service day and that went well. He continued that they put up bird boxes, and some folks from Antioch helped. Discussion ensued.

B) Master Plan Implementation Discussion

Chair Bocko stated that they have copies of the past check-in about how the master plan implementation is going, from fall of 2021. He asked everyone to take a few minutes to look through it and make note of what they know has been done. This might help surface some goals or priorities.

Chair Bocko asked for the group's thoughts, beginning with the Rachel Marshall area. He continued that one thing to start is to increase the educational signs, which they have plans to do with the bird ecology work. They need funding for that. Discussion ensued. Ms. Mathews stated that they will need to decide when the Rachel Marshall area will become active again. She continued that an actual trail needs to be defined, because it is not clear. She and a few others walked the area years ago and noted the need to define the park's property versus private property. Discussion continued. Someone noted that Eversource owns the property beyond the park property. Chair Bocko stated that there is an app that shows boundary lines on a map. Ms. Mathews stated that they should talk with Eversource, and she thinks a priority should be defining the path and making it a circuit that people could walk around. She continued that it would be great to make an outdoor classroom in that area, with cut logs for seating. Discussion continued about what it used to be like in the past, and how it could be used by local schools and students for field trips.

Ms. Casey spoke of how she remembers a conversation about how difficult it is to mobilize a class field trip nowadays, so she questions whether they should put so much effort into a scenario that might not happen. Chair Bocko agreed and spoke of his past experiences with the coordination of field trips. Ms. Mathews stated that speaking with her Friends hat on, they really need to be educating. She continued that she would love to do weekly bird walks in the Arboretum, but she does not rule out them doing something educational in the Rachel Marshall area. She spoke of how other groups could use the area as a classroom or to host educational events in.

Chair Bocko stated that they should write their ideas down. He continued that maybe if Public Works takes down trees, they could (use some as seating logs). Discussion continued.

Chair Bocko asked for thoughts on the north Arboretum. Discussion ensued about what the "north Arboretum" is. Ms. Mathews pointed out "mitigate areas of compaction." She spoke about an area of the path that gets many puddles, and the problems with that, such as people taking the high road around the puddles and thus making the trail go into the pollinator garden.

She was told there was a “ten-year plan” to do paths and asked if there is such a thing. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that the Open Space and Trails Plan is part of the CIP. She continued that that includes re-decking the entire bridge. Ms. Mathews asked if the trails could be re-dusted, too. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey spoke about a portion of the trail that was eroded, and how Public Works put up concrete barriers for safety. The City Engineer did a quick tour of the most important safety features.

Chair Bocko asked if putting in hardpack is something the (ARPAB) budget needs to take care of, or if that is part of the City’s regular park maintenance. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that she can find out. Chair Bocko spoke about how spreading hardpack in the past was helpful, for drainage. Discussion continued about drainage.

Ms. Casey stated that for anything to do with the bank, she thinks what they can do that close to the river is limited. They cannot be doing engineering projects on the river; that will have to be someone else. Chair Bocko spoke of the development where the Conservancy is going to be, and a possible boat ramp plan. There is some erosion as well. Ms. Mathews asked if Ms. Fisk-Hennessey has heard anything about what is happening with the dam. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied no. Ms. Krautmann stated that she thinks people are ignoring it because the cost to do anything else with it would be a lot. Mr. Haynes stated that often grants are available to fund the removal of a dam. Discussion continued about what might happen regarding the dam.

Chair Bocko asked for thoughts on the main Arboretum. ARPAB members noted that a few items in the document have already been done, like removing the conifers and the gazebo. Ms. Mathews stated that ADA-accessible path from the accessible parking spaces has never been talked about. Discussion ensued about how accessible the trail already is and what this item on the list could mean. Chair Bocko stated that he could look at the full master plan and see if there is more detail about this.

Chair Bocko asked for more thoughts on the main Arboretum. Ms. Mathews stated that she would say they are way behind in increasing the numbers of plants, but they are working on it.

Chair Bocko asked for thoughts on the southwest Arboretum, the area near Starbucks. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that she had a conversation with the City Engineer about the stormwater drainage, using all the information she had from the ARPAB and Friends. She continued that there are a couple of options, but they will not be instant fixes. They would have to build them into a plan. It would involve adding cisterns, and the rain garden could be another flower bed. Doing that in-house, the City Engineer estimates it would be about \$3,500. Contracting it out would be about \$8,500. Discussion ensued, and ARPAB members questioned why this would be the City’s responsibility instead of the owner of the commercial property and parking lot with water issues. Maybe that company would be willing to chip in to help with the cost. Per ARPAB members’ questions, Ms. Fisk-Hennessey clarified that no, the cost of the cistern is not part of any budget. Discussion continued.

Chair Bocko stated that “manage pooling water north of Starbucks parking lot” was checked off. Ms. Mathews replied that that check mark was made when they were planning to put in the rain garden. Chair Bocko stated that (another item) is “create accessible entrance.” Discussion ensued about the chain on the gate, and the lack of a way for someone with a stroller to walk in. People parking there walk up over the curb and on the grass. ARPAB members discussed “add vegetation” and agreed to push it far down the list, as it is not needed in this area.

6) Upcoming Events

A) Pollinator Palooza June 24

Chair Bocko stated that again, this is June 24, from 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM.

B) Monadnock Conservancy June 26

Chair Bocko asked what the Monadnock Conservancy is doing. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that it is like a property celebration, June 26th at 4:00 PM.

C) Art in the Park September

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that their (Parks & Rec’s) plan is to have the bridge done in the last couple weeks of August, so it is fresh for Art in the Park. Art in the Park is Labor Day weekend.

7) New, Other Business

Ms. Krautmann stated that she looked up Volksmarch in NH, and there is a NH/VT association. She continued that Volksmarching is a non-competitive 5k walk. There is also the American Volkssport Association. She has been trying to get ahold of them to find out what the regulations are, how to join, and so on and so forth, but she has not received any email response from them. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that the Sound Steppers group in Washington suggested working through the American Volkssport Association. She continued that she has been in contact with people there. The closest one (to Keene) is in NY.

ARPAB members agreed that it would be great to have one in NH. Discussion ensued, and Ms. Krautmann spoke of how it (the one-day event) would take a lot of planning, in terms of parking, security, food, and so on and so forth. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey suggested they try and involve their partner city, Einbeck, Germany. Others agreed. Chair Bocko stated that maybe instead of creating it from scratch, there is another context it could be put into, something that already has an event. Discussion continued about other community events in the fall, such as the Clarence De Mar marathon, Oktoberfest, Pumpkin Fest, and the Keene International Festival. Chair Bocko suggested they try and connect with the Partner City Committee.

Chair Bocko asked if there was any other new business. Ms. Mathews asked if he had heard from Rich Holschuh. Chair Bocko replied no, but he will remind him again. Ms. Mathews

replied that instead of having him go into the upper part, they (the Friends) would like him to go in the Rachel Marshall area. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that Tom Haynes has incredible expertise in building trails. She continued that they could bring him on board. Ms. Mathews replied that it would be great.

8) Adjourn – Next Meeting Tuesday, June 10, 2025 at 8:15 AM

There being no further business, Chair Bocko adjourned the meeting at 9:32 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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