

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, June 16, 2025

5:00 PM

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

Members Present:

Councilor Andrew Madison, Chair
Councilor Robert Williams, Vice Chair
Art Walker
Gary Flaherty
Katie Kinsella
Barbara Richter
Ken Bergman, Alternate
Thomas Haynes, Alternate
John Therriault, Alternate (Voting)

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner

Members Not Present:

Steven Bill
Bob Milliken, Alternate
Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Alternate

1) Call to Order

Chair Madison called the meeting to order at 5:04 PM.

2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – May 19, 2025

Revision: Lines 105–106, revise to read, “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.”

A motion by Mr. Therriault to adopt the May 19, 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 June 13 to do a lot of remaining planning for summer, discussing normal topics like trails and signage. He said the bulk of the meeting focused on the spillway bridge; they received engineered drawings. Next, the Director of Parks & Recreation, Carrah Fisk-Hennessey, would present the bridge plans to the City Council's Municipal Services, Facilities & Infrastructure (MSFI) Committee on June 25, which should allow the project to continue moving forward.

Next, Mr. Haynes shared that on June 7, the Subcommittee had its second Saturday volunteer day in the Park on National Trails Day. Three Subcommittee members led the group putting in a reroute on the big parcel near the water tower that the City acquired in spring 2024. Mr. Haynes said Saturday work for most of the summer was planned for that area because there were more trails to build. For example, the week after this meeting, a youth group would be coming to help build a trail via the Department of Parks & Recreation. Mr. Haynes expressed some hesitancy, having never led a youth group in trail building. He hoped to add some reroutes to a section of the Kingsbury Trail, which is furthest away from what most people use. The Commission thought Mr. Haynes would do great.

Mr. Haynes also reported that the Subcommittee was still working on recommendations for creating new bike trails as a policy for the City.

Mr. Walker also mentioned that Ms. Fisk-Hennessey had appointments to initiate the community funding aspect of the spillway bridge. Mr. Haynes agreed that part of the goal is for the bridge to be community supported and funded, since a lot of people would like having a bridge there. So, the Director of Parks & Recreation had taken that initiative.

B) Invasive Plant Species

Vice Chair Williams reported a successful invasive clearing at the North Stone Bridge on May 19 and said that, after several years of clearing at this site, the Commission's efforts had made a difference and other plants were coming back. Unfortunately, one of the other things coming back was Poison Ivy.

The Vice Chair invited participants to the next event immediately after this meeting (6:30–8:00 PM) at Ellis Harrison Park along Beaver Brook for the fourth year of invasive Japanese knotweed clearing. Vice Chair Williams had been working to keep a patch of knotweed cleared there all spring, stating it was doing pretty well. He purchased a number of plants using the \$100 allocated by the Commission in May 2025 and planted them in that location; the plants were doing well, and he would continue encouraging them along.

Vice Chair Williams spoke about the Commissions discussion in May 2025 to donate \$350 to the Keene Public Library's Seed & Tool Lending Library to help with the Commission's invasive clearing efforts. Vice Chair Williams spoke with the Library Director, Marti Fiske, who thought it was a great idea and had the Vice Chair look at what tools were already available, such as saws, clippers, and tools for digging. Those were the primary materials the Vice Chair had hoped to purchase. However, there were a few things Vice Chair Williams identified wanting to purchase that the Lending Library did not have: Parsnip Predator (specially designed shovel to cut invasive wild parsnip at the base) and electric pole saw (16' tall to help cut invasive vines on high trees). Vice Chair Williams did not think those needs would total \$350. He passed around a handout with the materials he suggested purchasing. He did not think any other equipment would be needed with the remaining Budget. However, he said the Lending Library also provides educational materials, so he suggested donating the remaining Budget for newer resources on invasive species management.

Mr. Bergman noted that Ladies' Wildwood Park had long been a hotspot for Japanese knotweed but this year, the vast majority was dead. Vice Chair Williams said it was sprayed in fall 2024. Mr. Bergman said it looked like they might have missed a few patches, but the effort was great because the plants no longer had leaves on them. The Vice Chair agreed it sounded successful. He worried about all the other things that were supposed to be growing there were also hit with the herbicide but thought everything at Ladies' Wildwood Park was likely too far gone to preserve. He recalled that area would be undergoing significant changes with the trees coming down as well.

Chair Madison recalled the Commission wanting an update on the Invasive Species Management Plan that MSFI was working on. He wondered if it would be worthwhile to reach out and ask them to discuss it at one of their upcoming meetings or at least get an update from City staff. Vice Chair Williams agreed that he would like to get it on the MSFI agenda for a progress update now that Budget season concluded. Vice Chair Williams noted that Councilor Laura Tobin, member of the MSFI Committee, would be at this evening's invasive species event and the Vice Chair would mention it.

Mr. Haynes asked if there had been further discussion about having a City staff member designated as an invasive species specialist; he recalled the Commission submitting a letter to the City Council with this recommendation. Vice Chair Williams hoped it would be a part of the MSFI Committee update he was seeking. Chair Madison would reach out to the Mayor and ask him to add it to the MSFI Committee's July agenda.

C) Land Conservation/Easement Monitoring

Ms. Richter reported that she received the books from a former Commissioner—two for specific easements and one very helpful resource guide, the latter of which she thought should be revamped for new members. The first easement was for a property along the Ashuelot River from the Stone Arch Bridge south—a 17-acre property protected to support the dwarf wedge

mussel. The second easement was for a property at the top of Concord Hill behind the neighborhoods that comes down toward Beaver Brook Falls (north of the Washington Street Extension). Ms. Richter had not walked the properties yet but drove by. The Concord Hill property appeared really overgrown, so she did not know how to access it yet; she thought she would have to contact the Neighborhood Association but knew the property was still owned by the Shaw family. Due to the weather, etc., Ms. Richter did not plan to actually walk the properties for easement monitoring until the fall, which the rest of the Commission agreed was logical. She welcomed another Commissioner joining her in the monitoring.

Ms. Richter wondered if these were the only two easements to monitor. Mr. Haynes thought there were a few other smaller parcels too, four or five total. Ms. Brunner encouraged Ms. Richter to review a shelf of binders on the City Hall fourth floor. Ms. Richter agreed, wondering if those smaller ones might be association-held properties, like Schuyler Way.

D) Pollinator Updates

Mr. Therriault shared that this was the first day of Pollinator Week: June 16–22, 2025. He announced Pollinator Palooza at Ashuelot River Park on June 24 from 11:00 AM–2:00 PM, with activities around the park focused on pollinators; for example, in 2024 the Monadnock Beekeeper’s Association had a demonstration hive.

Mr. Therriault spoke again about the large die-off of managed honeybees in the United States over the prior 12 months. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released preliminary results of their investigation based upon dissecting thousands of bees, mites, and hives. Mr. Therriault explained that the USDA found the Varroa mite (a threat to honeybees) developed immunity to amitraz, which had been the effective treatment for Varroa mite colonies. Now, he said backyard beekeepers would have to take a step back and reevaluate their processes. He went on to briefly elaborate honeybee reproduction—with queens, worker bees (female), and drones (male). Drones specifically have a 24-day egg-to-hatching length, which is vulnerable to Varroa mite brooding (egg, larvae, & pupae). Mr. Therriault reiterated the USDA’s preliminary results that amitraz was no longer effective for the mite.

4) Discussion Items:

A) Master Plan Update

Ms. Brunner briefly reported that the Master Plan Steering Committee met on June 10 to begin reviewing the draft Comprehensive Master Plan. They scheduled one more meeting on July 15, when she anticipated they would recommend its adoption to the Planning Board and City Council. The last main opportunity for public involvement was the June 3 Future Summit. However, once the Master Plan enters the formal adoption process, there would be one final Public Hearing before the Planning Board.

B) Outreach

None discussed.

C) Budget

Ms. Brunner noted after votes at the May meeting, checks were submitted on the Commission's behalf for donations to the Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee (\$150) and the Cheshire County Conservation District Farm Camp (\$250), and for the plant materials Vice Chair Williams purchased (\$100; see above). Before that, the Commission had already approved expending \$950 in annual dues to the NH Association of Conservation Commissions and \$200 annual membership to Bee City USA. So, Ms. Brunner reported \$350.00 remaining to be spent from the Commissions Budget before the end of the fiscal year.

i) *Materials for Invasive Plant Species Program*

The Commission continued its discussion of donating the remaining funds to the Keene Public Library's Seed & Tool Lending Library to help with the Commission's invasive clearing efforts (see discussion above). Discussion ensued about the price list Vice Chair Williams provided for the Parsnip Predator and electric pole saw, together totaling \$135, and Chair Madison estimated \$20 for shipping, for a total of \$155. Chair Madison wanted to ensure the Commission allocated all of its Budget before it was returned to the General Fund at the end of the fiscal year. The Commission agreed the remaining funds could be used to update the Library's invasive species resource materials for the public. There was consensus among the Commission about this plan to donate the remaining funds to the Library Collection for the Commission's invasive species program supplies and public outreach materials. Vice Chair Williams noted public relations is a huge part of this project.

Vice Chair Williams made the following motion, which was duly seconded by Mr. Therriault. On a vote of 7-0, the Conservation Commission designated \$350.00 from its Budget to the Library Collection for invasive species supplies and outreach.

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

Ms. Brunner noted she had been emailing several people about this process since the May 2025 meeting. At this point, she thought the Commission technically needed to hold a Public Hearing to spend money from the Conservation Land Acquisition Fund; 10 days' public notice required. Ms. Brunner recommended holding a Joint Public Hearing with the City Council. Chair Madison said it had happened before and Ms. Brunner agreed, citing scenic road hearings, for example. The caveat was the Council would not meet again until July 17 due to a holiday and then not again until August 21 because of its annual summer vacation. Chair Madison asked if the Commission should write a letter to the Council asking to purchase the land or do so on its own authority. Ms. Brunner said the Commission could, on its own authority, hold a Public Hearing,

then enter a non-public session to vote on whether or not to purchase the land, then send that vote to the City Council. The City Council would then hold a non-public session to deliberate the purchase and vote.

The City Council must be involved regardless, so Ms. Brunner recommended the Commission schedule a Joint Public Hearing with the City Council. She explained that in the Joint Public Hearing scenario, the Commission conducts its deliberation in a non-public session. Discussion ensued briefly as there was confusion about when the Commission would vote after that non-public session. Ms. Richter asked if there was a rush; had there been any negotiations on the property yet? Ms. Brunner did not think there had been negotiations. Deputy City Manager, Andy Bohannon, got back to her about the property, stating it would be an important parcel for the City to acquire. However, Ms. Brunner was unsure if anyone from the City had reached out to the property owner. Chair Madison thought it would be best for him to request a conversation with the City Manager.

Chair Madison made the following motion, which was duly seconded by Vice Chair Williams. On a vote of 7–0, the Conservation Commission authorized Chair Madison to work with the City Manager to begin the process of acquiring the property at 0 Gilsum Road.

Mr. Haynes noted that now there was more than one parcel for sale on the same side of that right-of-way, all of similar size, which he thought would be of interest for the Chair's conversation with the City Manager. Chair Madison said he would email the City Manager the evening of this meeting to initiate the discussions.

Mr. Bergman asked the easiest way to publicly access the lots. Chair Madison said Old Gilsum Road. Mr. Haynes advised the easiest way (shorter walk) would be the water tower road; park at the cul-de-sac at the end of Meetinghouse Road and walk to where the trail loops around and it is within 100 yards. Mr. Haynes added that the other lot Mr. Flaherty mentioned was a little further down Old Gilsum Road but on the same side and with similar wood stock.

Ms. Richter asked if the Commission had land protection criteria to follow and evaluate when deciding whether to purchase land. Chair Madison said not really. Ms. Richter said it was something she could help with and that criteria could help guide these decisions and votes. Chair Madison said he would follow up with the City Manager and City Attorney before diving too deeply into that.

Mr. Bergman recalled that he and Mr. Von Plinsky met with Anne McBride from the Monadnock Conservancy in 2024 and received their land criteria values, which he said were slightly different than what the City would have. He said the Commission struggled for a long time to develop a rational basis for justifying, and when it developed criteria or a longer-term plan, the Commission often reacted to immediate opportunities on the market, overriding the longer plan. He still had the materials from Ms. McBride and would forward them.

Ms. Brunner displayed the Keene Conservation Commission Land Protection Criteria adopted in April 2018. She would send it to the whole Commission to consider if it needs revision.

E) Annual Report to City Council

Chair Madison recalled that the City Council adopted a policy in 2024 asking that City committees submit Annual Reports. The Chair offered to prepare the Report. No guidance was provided for what the reports should include, so Chair Madison planned to provide metrics like invasives pulls, outreach events, major land acquisitions, trail work, and progress at Goose Pond, etc. If any Commissioners had other details to include in the Report, Chair Madison asked them to email him. He would include the draft Report in the July agenda packet for the Commissions to review before submitting it to Council. Vice Chair Williams noted that Councilor Haas—whose idea it was for the Annual Reports—reviewed the Commission’s work and might have drafted some of what Chair Madison mentioned; the Vice Chair would share that with the Chair. Chair Madison thought the Report was a good opportunity to provide the public with a concise record of the Commission’s work and build public support.

5) New or Other Business

A) NHDES Standard Dredge & Fill Application: Eversource T198 Line Project

Ms. Brunner said the City gets a lot of these documents that just have to be filed away. She received this one beyond the 14-day notice period but wanted to include it in the Commission’s packet, so it knew what was happening; it was beyond the period to submit comments. That said, the applicant would need a Wetland Permit for impacts to the wetlands and would be building temporary access roads to get there through the surface water buffer. So, Ms. Brunner said they would need a Surface Water Protection Conditional Use Permit, and the Conservation Commission would be a part of the process in a different context.

Mr. Haynes asked when this work was proposed, and several Commissioners replied fall 2025. Ms. Brunner agreed, stating the developer (Eversource) had done a number of these projects and she thought they were basically on a rotating schedule; she thought the Commission would see several more in the future. Mr. Flaherty thought they had been diligent in the work. Ms. Brunner agreed, referring to the utility lines by Island Street as an example.

Mr. Bergman shared a story from many years prior near Rt-101 when a pole with a cross piece appeared close to falling down and, even though Public Service of NH was called, they did nothing about it. When the pole came down in a storm and water puddles were everywhere, he said a worker was electrocuted and died. So, Mr. Bergman said these are important things to take care of and that tragedy might not have happened if they responded to their scouts’ reports. He went on to discuss the different structures in each state, as well as the new taller metal structures replacing the old wooden ones.

Chair Madison did not think there was anything for the Commission to do as this sounded like Eversource's standard maintenance routine. Ms. Richter noted Eversource was finally releasing funding for maintenance projects, so Keene could see re-build projects coming through. Mr. Bergman commented on the interesting Natural Heritage and Fish & Wildlife reports with leopard frog and wood frog sightings in the general areas that he contributed to.

6) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Madison adjourned the meeting at 5:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katryna Kibler, Minute Taker
June 23, 2025

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner