

**City of Keene**  
**New Hampshire**

**ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Tuesday, July 8, 2025**

**8:15 AM**

**Room 22,  
Recreation Center**

**Members Present:**

Paul Bocko, Chair  
Suzy Krautmann, Vice Chair  
Leslie Casey  
Dian Mathews  
Kelly Cook  
Arthur Winsor, Alternate

**Staff Present:**

Carrah Fisk-Hennessey, Director of Parks,  
Recreation

**Members Not Present:**

Thomas Haynes, Alternate

**1) Call to Order & Roll Call**

Chair Bocko called the meeting to order at 8:19 AM and roll call ensued.

Members of the public were present: Raynee Carlson and Karen Flavin of the Friends of the Ashuelot River Park Arboretum.

**2) Minutes of the Previous Meeting – June 10, 2025**

A motion by Ms. Casey to adopt the June 10, 2025 minutes as presented was duly seconded by Vice Chair Krautmann and the motion carried unanimously.

**3) Friends of the Ashuelot River Park Arboretum**

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

- A member resigned from the Friends Board, which was now at five members, the minimum. Chair Bocko asked how many they could have, and Ms. Mathews said up to 11.
- The Friends applied for a grant from the University of NH Master Gardner's Association. The grants were typically \$500, which was what the Friends were expecting. They were anticipating a notification in April, but it was late.
- The Friends determined that landscape cloth is not an acceptable practice and would not be funded.

- Barry bought approximately 50 cobblestone pamphlets when the Friends first started and updated the address, which was now wrong because they had changed their PO Box in Marlborough. Cheryl Lower, Antioch University New England, has offered to make stickers. Once completed, Ms. Mathews would provide new pamphlets to Director of Parks & Recreation, Carrah Fisk-Hennessey. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey asked if the Friends sourced those pamphlets at a lower price. Ms. Mathews said yes.
- The Friends placed a small metal fence around the two new pollinator beds and placing the big cobblestones from the rain garden around them. They left the Samaritan's little stones around the rain garden. The 17–18 big cobblestones were arranged around the pollinator gardens, spaced, and slanted; the fence was placed inside the stones to allow for weed whacking.
- It was the time of season to make a full plantings plan. So, the Friends developed a purchasing list for places like Bagley Pond Perennials and Nasami Farm Nursery.
- Ms. Mathews noted that many people came to Pollinator Palooza in particular for the networking experience. Benee Hershon from the Cheshire County Conservation District who was on the Grant Committee approached Ms. Mathews with many ideas for how to fix the rain garden (e.g., French ditch, bridge, gravel). Ms. Mathews explained to them why the Board had not implemented all of those options and directed them to City Staff. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey has also been in touch with Benee and will be meeting with her soon.
- Ms. Flavin reported that the Friends unearthed two old sprinkler heads in the pollinator garden when Tim was bulldozing; they marked them with stones. They were in the ground and might be attached to the old system, so they left them for City staff to address like they had in some other beds. Ms. Mathews said it was hard to tell on her sprinkler map.
- The Friends spoke about one of the beds along the parking lot fence being overrun (75–90%) with a tall invasive yellow flower species, which Ms. Casey confirmed to be a *helianthus*—a type of helenium flower. Ms. Carlson said Ms. Casey and others worked hard trying to get it out at the roots but were unable to sufficiently. Ms. Carlson suggested using a small machine from the City to remove the whole top layer and then topping the area with more compost.

Mr. Winsor said there was a note in the minutes about eliminating the grass path between the two pollinator beds and asked if Ms. Fisk-Hennessey wanted that to happen. Ms. Mathews said she wanted the grass path to go away but Ms. Flavin noted the Friends could not use grant-awarded funding for hardscape. Mr. Winsor asked if they wanted to join the two pollinator beds. Ms. Mathews said no, they wanted to keep them separate because it is such a large area and they knew people would look for a way through the middle; she said there would be a path someday. Discussion ensued briefly as Ms. Mathews described the existing configuration of the pollinator garden.

Both Ms. Flavin and Ms. Casey mentioned sending pictures to other Board members because it looked like even more chunks of the sculptures were missing. The Board briefly discussed whether the sculptures were being smashed or stolen. Ms. Mathews said Ms. Forrest Bencivenga, the art teacher at Franklin Elementary School, thought kids liked their work so much they were taking it home, which the Board called a different type of vandalism.

**4) Finance Report**

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey was pleased to report the Trustees officially approved the Board's Budget. Additionally, she said the contract was signed with Bartlett Tree, who removed \$160.00 from the contract to take into account no longer treating the Siberian elm roots. The new Budget total for that line item piece of Bartlett Tree's proposal was now \$1,225 instead of \$1,385.

Ms. Casey briefly mentioned the cost for the Arborist's soil sample collection but then noted it included other services like treatment. She thought the Friends might have been able to collect the soil for a lower cost.

Mr. Winsor asked if the City let the previous landscaper go and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey said yes. Mr. Winsor asked if there were possibilities for a new company. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey welcomed ideas to research. Before the City generously offered, Ms. Flavin mentioned speaking with Key Landscaping, who she called pleasant. Vice Chair Krautmann mentioned Ecoscapes Landscaping based in Chesterfield and Mr. Winsor suggested Keith Feiker, the owner. Chair Bocko suggested that Ms. Fisk-Hennessey should request a sample of mulch from any landscaper she would talk to because that had been an issue in the past.

There was some confusion about the water access at the park. Ms. Mathews questioned the water sprinkler being left open without a lock. Ms. Carlson said she spoke with Frank Anderson, Parks & Recreation Superintendent, who said the sprinkler was working and they would be trying to leave it open without a lock in this Park unless it became an issue.

**5) Project Tracking**

**A) Master Plan Implementation**

Chair Bocko noted that most everything the Board was doing at this time was to implement the Park Master Plan.

Mr. Winsor asked to revisit the permanent sign design/development. He asked to invite Nicole Cullinane to a meeting with the Board to confirm everything was in order for the sign design, noting her talent. The Board agreed to try to schedule a meeting with Ms. Cullinane on July 16 at 3:00 PM. Mr. Winsor also noted the need to confirm if the sign maker, Peter Poanessa, could move the sign. Ms. Mathews recalled there would need to be a place on the sign for the QR code linking to a cobblestone spreadsheet. Ms. Winsor asked for this meeting to concentrate on the front of the sign—history and photos for Ms. Cullinane's design—and suggested placing the QR code on the back of the sign. Discussion ensued about the sign needing to move, because in the current location, the back would not be accessible, and Ms. Mathews wanted to ensure the QR code would have a place. Ms. Carlson added the issue of safety in moving the sign. Mr. Winsor and Chair Bocko thought Mr. Poanessa would advise as a professional.

**6) Recent & Upcoming Events**

Mr. Winsor reported on the Monadnock Conservancy's groundbreaking on its new Headquarters next to the Park. He said Ms. Fisk-Hennessey gave an incredible speech. He added that Amanda Littleton was the new Conservancy Director. Ms. Littleton wanted to work collaboratively with the Board, which Mr. Winsor thought was a great match. Mr. Winsor also reported that the Conservancy's new building would be built in a factory by Bensonwood (the same company that created the Park's pergola) and essentially pop up on site; the building would be net zero for energy. He called it a great addition to the Park. Mr. Winsor said the groundbreaking was well attended. There, Mrs. Putnam of the Putnam family approached him, stating her hope that the City would institute QR codes on this property like at Ashuelot River Park. Mr. Winsor was reassured that she recognized the Board did something progressive and thought it should be carried throughout the City.

Chair Bocko noted that Antioch University New England's Library would be moving into the plaza next to Ashuelot River Park/Monadnock Conservancy. So, he spoke with Ms. Littleton and Cheryl Lower of Antioch about this new activity and collaboration as well, leveraging what could happen for public education with the Conservancy there. Chair Bocko said his push is always school and getting more kids to the Park, and he thought it would be good once kids are there learning about the Conservancy's building and there is a playground. He hoped the Board could seek some funding because it would require support for schools to use the new space more. Ms. Mathews said it would be a good grant opportunity. There was a question about what separates the two properties and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey spoke about stormwater movement. Ms. Carlson spoke about the ability to spray herbicide on both sides of the fence (as well as the concrete barriers in the corners of the Park).

Chair Bocko and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey agreed that there would be a very tight time frame for Art in the Park. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey shared that the Parks team still planned to redeck the bridge during the 10-day period between the pools/summer programs closing and Art in the Park. Vice Chair Krautmann asked about the decking material. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey was unsure whether it would be natural or Trex style decking; she would speak to the Engineering Division about it to confirm. She explained that the decking would be bolted from underneath and therefore more challenging than a traditional deck replacement, yet also safer and more accessible when crossing the bridge.

Ms. Casey reported that due to the heat, the Pollinator Pallooza was shortened 12:30 PM by the Cheshire County Conservation District. So, everyone had very limited time to engage the public.

Ms. Casey reported on a conversation with Barbara Skuly, Chair of the Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee (ARLAC), during Pollinator Palooza. Ms. Casey explained that the State of NH created the Local Advisory Committees by statute in the state's various watersheds. Ms. Skuly introduced herself and members of the Friends showed her where they had removed invasive species along the Riverbank and ongoing problems. They discussed ARLAC's process of

updating the Ashuelot River Corridor Management Plan. Ms. Skuly agreed that invasives were a big problem and there should probably be a coordinated effort to deal with removal. Ms. Casey explained that ARLAC members are located in pods throughout the watershed, with Ms. Skuly local to Keene. Ms. Casey thought it would be nice to invite those representatives to Board/Friends meetings occasionally when discussing watershed-wide issues like invasives. She remarked that it had been a long time since this Board, or the Friends, formally engaged with ARLAC. Ms. Casey said she would follow up with Ms. Skuly and Chair Bocko said this could go on the August agenda.

**7) New or Other Business**

Vice Chair Krautmann and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey provided an update on Volksmarch, including a handout. They reported on a fascinating conversation with the Twin State Volksmarch Association of VT and NH—Cindy Tray (of Hancock) and Carol Lyn Gieske. Vice Chair Krautmann reported learning that Keene already had a very outdated Volksmarch site, indicating to meet at the old Panera. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey explained that the route on the handout was published in 2021 on the American Volksmarch Association (AVA) website. She paid \$2 to download this route, which crossed directly through Ashuelot River Park already. Ms. Mathews suspected that when members of the public approached her while gardening in the Arboretum stating they found something online, this was likely what they were referring to. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey said it is called an AVA “Online Startbox,” which is hard to find if someone does not know what they are looking for; she said there were many steps to click through. Vice Chair Krautmann confirmed the City was a member and suggested a QR code for it should go on the new Park sign.

Discussion ensued briefly as the Board reviewed the route aspects and different cross streets. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey listed possible options: keep the route as is, add to it, partner with the City’s Bicycle & Pedestrian Path Advisory Committee (BPPAC) on options, and/or partner with Keene’s Sister City—Einbeck, Germany. Ms. Krautmann noted that these routes began for the military coming back from Germany in the 1960s.

The Board agreed it would be best to change the starting place to the Park instead of Panera. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey thought the rationale behind Panera was for the bathroom but said with the Park expansion, there would be a restroom when the site development is complete (a number of years). Everyone agreed there were bathrooms in the nearby gas station and Starbucks as well in the meantime. Chair Bocko asked if a bathroom is required and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey thought it would be considered an amenity not a necessity, and others agreed restrooms were likely just a routine for the AVA start points.

Chair Bocko asked about updating the City’s AVA membership and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey was unsure. Vice Chair Krautmann said they needed to find out how, noting that the members seemed to be aging out, with the time since they first developed. Ms. Cook was grateful this came forward

as it seemed ideal with Keene's Sister City so prevalent. Chair Bocko said he was happy to work with Ms. Fisk-Hennessey and everyone on this.

Vice Chair Krautmann explained that she had researched two Einbeck Sister City groups, one regular and one musical. She noted that Keene would be hosting two people from the Einbeck musical group in October 2025. Sandra Howard from Keene State College was in charge of the Einbeck visit. Ms. Mathews suggested involving Keene State College students. Discussion ensued about timing and the Board thought Vice Chair Krautmann should try to contact the Einbeck musical group sooner than later with August approaching. Vice Chair Krautmann agreed.

Lastly on New/Other Business, Ms. Mathews thanked Chair Bocko for connecting her with the Antioch Bird Club (ABC). Chair Bocko said he had not been able to read Ms. Mathews' most recent email. Chair Bocko asked if she went in the Park with Chris from ABC yet, and Ms. Mathews said no. However, when she was in the park recently, she heard she heard kingfishers and then saw two males that seemed to be fighting over territory. She also saw a king bird feeding a flying around, as well as nuthatches, a woodpecker, and something exotic she could not recall. Ms. Mathews also reported that the morning of Steven Lamonde's Bird Walk, the group saw a pair of hawks that had also been spotted all over Main Street; no one was sure where their nest was. Ms. Carlson asked if anyone had checked the Park birdhouses and Chair Bocko said no. Chair Bocko said he would encourage Chris from ABC to connect with Ms. Mathews soon, as Chris had suggested some August dates for a bird walk. The Board agreed that bird walks during other months and seasons would also be valuable for various topics, like migration.

## **8) Adjournment**

The Board changed its August meeting to the 19th.

There being no further business, Chair Bocko adjourned the meeting at 9:12 AM.

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

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