

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, October 20, 2025

5:00 PM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Councilor Robert Williams, Vice Chair
Steven Bill
Gary Flaherty
Bob Milliken, Alternate (Voting)
Ken Bergman, Alternate (Voting)
Thomas Haynes, Alternate (Voting)
John Therriault, Alternate (Voting)

Staff Present:

Megan Fortson, Planner

Members Not Present:

Councilor Andrew Madison, Chair
Art Walker
Barbara Richter
Katie Kinsella
Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Alternate

1) Call to Order

Vice Chair Williams called the meeting to order at 5:02 PM and welcomed Planner Megan Fortson as acting Staff Liaison.

2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – July 21, 2025

Revision: line 264, change the first word to “come.”

A motion by Mr. Haynes to adopt the July 21, 2025 minutes as amended was duly seconded by Mr. Bergman and the motion carried unanimously.

3) Report-Outs:

A) Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Subcommittee

Mr. Haynes reported that the Subcommittee met in-house instead of in the woods on Friday, October 10, 2025. The group discussed its productive Saturday trail workdays. They also talked about the parcel near the water tower that the Conservation Commission recommended the City

purchase with the Conservation Land Acquisition Fund. The City now had the title in hand for the parcel; the Subcommittee spent most of summer 2025 working on the trails there and installing signage on Saturday volunteer workdays and Mr. Haynes said it had been productive. Additional trail work included creating steps on the east side of the Loop Trail where people were cutting down over the banking, especially in the winter; hopefully this would avoid people creating unofficial paths off the trail. The Subcommittee hoped to have one more Saturday workday in 2025 to keep working on lined up projects.

Mr. Haynes also reported on the spillway bridge project that was often the Subcommittee's focus. The Subcommittee received the engineered bridge design and met with City staff multiple times on site. It was decided that the bridge approaches would be cut so the machinery would be able to dig the holes for the concrete abutments. At this point, it was time for the City to bring the backhoe and begin that work, which Mr. Haynes said the Subcommittee hoped for by this date, so the actual bridge could be completed by the end of October 2025. However, Mr. Haynes thought the City had other obligations at this time. The Subcommittee began its fundraising campaign for the bridge. The Savings Bank of Walpole would be matching all donations dollar for dollar up to \$10,000. Mr. Haynes distributed flyers to Commissioners and asked them to share with businesses/people who have strong feelings about Goose Pond. He also encouraged his fellow Commissioners to consider contributing as he would be.

Mr. Bill added that he observed some digging for the bridge foundation happening on Saturday, October 18th because the City was concerned there would be ledge. Mr. Bill disagreed and did not believe there would be ledge. Using the City's machines around the two bridge endpoints, no ledge was located in the initial exploration.

Mr. Bergman asked if \$10,000 was the fundraising goal. Mr. Haynes said no, just what The Savings Bank of Walpole would match. Mr. Bill said that since they were matching that amount, it would be important to pinpoint local businesses to place brochures, like bike shops, where there is foot traffic from Goose Pond users. Mr. Haynes said it had only been one week of getting the word out and the Subcommittee welcomed any connections from other Commissioners. Vice Chair Williams was very impressed.

Vice Chair Williams noted that the City Council's Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee would be discussing paying for the pedestrian bridge at Goose Pond on October 23, 2025.

Related to Goose Pond, Vice Chair Williams also reported that the three properties the Conservation Commission was working to purchase on Old Gilsum Road were successfully purchased by the City. The City paid \$50,000 for all three, \$15,000 for two each and \$20,000 for the third; this was less than the asking price but above the assessed value. Mr. Haynes called it exciting news. Vice Chair Williams said that the City had purchased several parcels on Old Gilsum Road. He thought it was worthwhile because there could easily be changes in state law,

creating an ability to develop those lots there and he did not think that would be ideal for some of Keene's most valuable habitat. Other Commissioners agreed.

Mr. Bill also reported that he would be leading a glacial geology walk at Goose Pond on Saturday, October 25, 2025 at 9:00 AM, meeting at the South Trailhead.

B) Invasive Plant Species

Vice Chair Williams said there had been three invasive species events since the last meeting. One was unofficial at Covenant Living of Keene, where they requested help with Japanese knotweed, and many residents participated in the removal effort. Commissioners advised the facility on how to manage the invasive in the future. Vice Chair Williams reported that one of the sponsored invasive species activities was at Woodland Cemetery and did not have many participants. He said these events were drawing fewer volunteers, which concerned him. He noted this had been the fifth year at Woodland Cemetery and he could see a difference, which made him happy, but there was still much more to do. More recently, Vice Chair Williams said there was an event at Robin Hood Park, with four volunteers. He said those four did great work but there were times when the effort was drawing 10 to 15 volunteers, allowing for more work. He thought it would be important to think about what to do differently in 2026 to draw volunteers.

Vice Chair Williams also reported that he noticed a lot of Japanese knotweed was sprayed with pesticides around City properties. He said the plants appeared very brown, much like the knotweed that was treated with glyphosate in Ladies' Wildwood Park in 2024. However, he had not heard of an official treatment plan for City properties. Mr. Bill wondered if it could have been affected by the frost. Vice Chair said it was around the same time as the frost, but he had seen the distinction between the two, and this did not look like frost-treated knotweed. Mr. Bergman said glyphosate has a radical effect on the knotweed. Vice Chair Williams agreed that at Ladies' Wildwood, even some of the supporting plants were killed, which was concerning, but the knotweed was much changed, and he expected to see something similar in a lot of these locations. Vice Chair Williams said he noticed that some care was taken not to spray the new plants the Commission had planted. Based on what he saw at these various City properties, he anticipated the knotweed situation would be different in 2026. He noticed in Ladies' Wildwood Park that some of the dead knotweed stands remained unless they were addressed. He thought there might have to be additional cutting or a plan to get other plants growing in that area. Vice Chair Williams thought the 2026 invasive species program might be slightly different.

Mr. Therriault wondered if the Conservation Commission could get permission to spread a wildflower mix in areas like Ladies' Wildwood Park, where knotweed was mitigated, and see what comes up next year. Vice Chair Williams asked who on City staff to contact. Ms. Fortson thought Parks and Recreation would be best because this is City-maintained land. Ms. Fortson offered to speak with the Commission's official Staff Liaison, Senior Planner Mari Brunner, to determine the correct path forward. Mr. Therriault said the time to spread the seeds would be

now (i.e., fall) so the seeds could go through the cold process and germinate in the spring. Councilor Williams noted that generic wildflower mix concerned him because some seeds included might not be native. Mr. Therriault said all the *northeast wildflower mixes* are truly for the northeast, not for southwest New Hampshire. He explained the interesting part about a seed mix is that of the dozens of varieties spread, only maybe five might grow because they have the correct pH, sun, and conditions. Vice Chair Williams thought the Commission should consider specific locations to spread the wildflower mix. Mr. Bill asked if the mix would be readily available. Mr. Therriault said yes, he even had a few pounds at home.

Mr. Bergman asked about the fate of the red pines at Ladies' Wildwood Park, stating that they looked really poor. He was unsure whether the red pine scale had reached the Park yet, but he knew it was in other parts of Keene. Vice Chair Williams said red pine scale had reached Keene and the City was having to get rid of many trees in Dinsmoor Woods, one of the main hotspots, as well as Wheelock Park across the street from Ladies' Wildwood. Vice Chair Williams said he asked City staff if there was a plan for a similar tree cutting operation in Ladies' Wildwood Park. Staff said no because there is more of a diversity of tree species in Ladies' Wildwood and it is not as much of a monoculture as Wheelock Park or Dinsmoor Woods. So, Vice Chair Williams said at this time they were confident the Park could be handled more naturally and if trees were to start dying, they would be removed. Discussion ensued briefly about the small hardwood saplings by the middle school. Mr. Bill asked who ultimately decides the tree cutting plans. Vice Chair Williams said the City Council; they could ultimately overrule something but would listen to the experts, who in this case were City staff, specifically Parks and Recreation. Mr. Haynes recalled some trees were taken down and replanted already in Wheelock Park.

Vice Chair Williams reported another invasive species he recently learned of, coming to a lake near you: the spiny water flea. They negatively affect food webs by eating all the other zooplankton, and species up the food chain do not prefer them as food. He was unsure whether the Commission could do anything about the species.

Related to Goose Pond, Mr. Bergman reported walking with Ryan Owens (Monadnock Conservancy) on Tippin Rock Trail in Swanzey. Mr. Bergman mentioned beech leaf disease and beech bark disease. He wondered if the Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Subcommittee was noticing anything. Mr. Haynes asked if the diseases would appear on the beech bark and Mr. Bergman said that it would be one of the most noticeable pockmarks. Mr. Haynes did not have a sense of how far it had spread but said it was visible on a lot of beech trees here and there. Mr. Bergman asked for a sense of the beech leaf disease that is caused by a nematode carried by wind that enters through the tree roots. Mr. Haynes was unsure about the beech leaf disease. In the forest, Mr. Flaherty suggested looking toward the sun allows for seeing the changes in leaf color. Vice Chair Williams said the beech trees were already decimated by previous disease and it was unfortunate if another would finish them.

Mr. Milliken reported pulling some wild parsnips on Court Street near a wooded area with a little pond. He said it was pretty deep and would probably need attention for a few years because he

thought it went to seed at one point. He found the source, going up toward the Bike Path and downtown, someone had a garden with weeds and wild parsnip. Mr. Milliken guessed that for the past few years the City snowplows had gone over it and carried it further down the road because he found small patches all the way up Court Street; a lot did not go to seed, so he pulled them. The Commission would watch the patch by the pond in future years. Mr. Milliken asked what he could do to approach the homeowner about the invasive on their property. Vice Chair Williams said he could approach them as a neighbor. Mr. Milliken said he could offer to take care of it as a neighbor and to monitor it, because those seeds last five years in the ground and germinate. It is a challenging invasive to track, especially if it gets in the water and goes downstream. He pulled three full garbage bags of the invasive that City crews hauled away. Mr. Bill asked if there are precautions when pulling wild parsnips. Mr. Milliken said yes, it is unpleasant to touch the sap. Also, it really requires effort to break them and pull them from the bottom; he uses a tent stake to loosen the dirt, and they come out like carrots. Mr. Bill mentioned the species are all over Iceland and Mr. Milliken said they were brought here as a spice.

Mr. Haynes asked if there were any updates about the Commission's suggestion of a City invasive species specialist. Vice Chair Williams thought the Commission would have to bring that up again and/or he could remind staff of its importance at the upcoming City Council Goals Workshop. Mr. Haynes thought Vice Chair Williams or Chair Madison sent the Council a letter with this suggestion, and Mr. Haynes wondered if there was progress since the July meeting. Vice Chair Williams said that was correct, and then nothing came of it. Mr. Bill asked if there was a Council meeting about it over the summer. Vice Chair Williams said there were Council meetings, but this would be City staff bringing a plan back to the Council. He would ensure it was well communicated at the City Council Goals Workshop.

C) Land Conservation/Easement Monitoring

Ms. Richter was not present to report.

D) Pollinator Updates

Mr. Therriault recalled that at the July meeting, he was asked to provide the Commission with a copy of the Annual Report he submitted to Bee City USA with all text and photos. He was unable to download the copy with photos from the website. The reports are submitted annually in February/March and this year, Bee City USA did not publish them until late July. Vice Chair Williams recalled someone recently telling him that they were pleased to have learned Keene's Bee City status.

Mr. Therriault said one small issue was not having a Bee City USA sign in the City. He had a pollinator area sign in his yard, so he said he kind of took credit for that when applying. He noted that when the Commission was getting Bee City approved, a City Councilor was really adamant that they, "did not want another damn sign put up somewhere." Mr. Therriault said he never pressed it. Vice Chair Williams asked if there were places in the City with similar signs. Mr.

Therriault cited the sign near the Kohls plaza on West Street for the Sister City and another for Tree City. Mr. Bill suggested Wheelock Park. Mr. Therriault said Bee City USA does not care where the sign is placed within the City. He noted there was an electronic file suggesting what the sign should look like and in theory with Council support, he was going to take it to the Public Works Department Sign Shop. However, he backed off after the negative feedback from the City Council. He preferred to get the Bee City USA approved overall than the physical sign. Councilor Williams said he had not heard about that issue. He felt like Bee City was advertised and that these are all good things that make Keene a place people want to be a part of, so the City should show that.

Mr. Milliken asked what distinguishes a pollinator garden. Mr. Therriault said primarily a large enough area of native wildflowers and that it is worthwhile for pollinators to visit. He gave the example of a 10-foot diameter circle of wildflowers, in which pollinators can visit 150 flowers in one variety without having to go very far.

4) Discussion Items:

A) Master Plan Update

Ms. Fortson reported that the 2025 Keene Comprehensive Master Plan was adopted by the Planning Board and endorsed by the City Council during September 2025. Next would be the Council Goals Workshop to align their goals with the six Pillars in the Master Plan. Ms. Fortson said that with this, this Master Planning process had officially concluded and would switch into more of the implementation phase. At some point, Vice Chair Williams thought the Commission should look through the Master Plan Pillars to determine what it could help to achieve; he thought a lot was very relevant. Ms. Fortson would send a link to the 2025 Master Plan to the Conservation Commission.

B) Correspondence:

i) *Thank You Letter From the Wantastiquet-Monadnock Trail Coalition*

The Commission received a communication from the Wantastiquet-Monadnock Trail Coalition in thanks for the \$150.00 donation.

ii) *Letter from Paul Hebert re: Invasive Plant Management on City-Owned Land*

Vice Chair Williams had not visited the property yet, but the City received a letter from neighbors in a condominium complex on Arch Street that abuts City-owned land across a brook. He said the neighbors were rightfully concerned about Japanese knotweed growing on the City side of the brook. He was interested to know if that specific knotweed was included in the recent spraying the Commission discussed. Vice Chair Williams thought it best to wait one month, ascertain, and discuss again. Mr. Therriault thought this location was more of a Public Works than Parks and Recreation Department issue. He noted it was not too far from a big piece of

City-owned land between Arch Street and Bradford Road that is the City's emergency drinking well for the west side of Keene, so Mr. Therriault said Public Works is very uncomfortable spraying any chemicals there. Vice Chair Williams agreed that it is a very good reason to be uncomfortable. Mr. Bergman asked if that is different than West Street Wellfield by Dusty Dog Farm. Mr. Therriault said it is different, but they are both a part of the aquifer that draws from White Brook. He spoke about the golf course sharing a property line with a field that has backup wells for Dusty Dog. Mr. Bergman mentioned knotweed growing thickly along White Brook and also by Whitcombs Mill Rd. Mr. Therriault noted the golf course had fought knotweed mechanically for years.

Vice Chair Williams wondered if this location on across the brook on Arch Street would require mechanical treatment, a little more than volunteers pulling it up by the roots for a small patch. Mr. Therriault suggested the Public Works Department doing the pulling. Vice Chair Williams said there is also a method of cutting and covering with an impermeable barrier plus mulch, and waiting five years. He recalled Mr. Milliken mentioning a metal mesh technique that the group from Alstead tried with the University of New Hampshire. Mr. Milliken said they claimed two years to be effective, noting the plant still grows through but the metal strangles it; the plant must be cut, and it weakens the roots until they die. Vice Chair Williams was interested in seeing the results; he anticipated smaller plants that would still need to be managed in some way. He agreed that choking the roots is an important part of the process. Mr. Milliken suggested that if they could find a metal that could be trusted to rust away. Mr. Therriault agreed that it should be metal, not landscaping fabric, because the metal strangles the plant shoots as they try to grow larger in circumference.

Mr. Milliken pointed out a firebush outside the Recreation Center. Vice Chair Williams said he would love a City initiative to remove such plants on City property. Discussion ensued about Commissioners removing burning bushes on their own properties in past years but in some cases, they keep trying to come back. Mr. Bergman saw them spreading along the rail bed, north of Whitcombs Mill Road. Vice Chair Williams recalled the Commission pulling a lot of burning bushes on the Rail Trail by Eastern Avenue and he was surprised they did not grow back the next year. Mr. Milliken and Vice Chair Williams discussed there being fewer and smaller burning bushes at the Arch Bridge year after year thanks to these efforts.

Vice Chair Williams concluded with the letter from Mr. Hebert, suggesting that Commissioners needed to look at the location, and recommending mechanical management because spraying is not ideal. He thought the Commission should confirm this was near the City's emergency drinking well for the west side of Keene as Mr. Bergman thought. Mr. Bill suggested setting a date for all of this to become reality. He noted the final invasive species event was scheduled for Veteran's Day (November 11) and being shorthanded on volunteers, it would probably not make sense to try adding a subsequent event for this effort. Vice Chair Williams thought it might be possible with a lot of volunteers, noting that volunteers often show up in specific City parks where they recreate and see the invasives often, so that might not work here. Mr. Bill wondered if Scouts could be good contributors for this project, noting a few new troops had started and it

would be a good way to get new people involved. Vice Chair Williams thought the Scouts would be great. Mr. Milliken mentioned a new horticulture teacher at the Cheshire Career Center at Keene High School. He hoped to talk to her about bringing students to volunteer. Vice Chair Williams put that idea on the November 2025 meeting agenda and would like to visit that program at some point.

C) NHACC 55th Annual Meeting and Conference – Nov. 1, 2025

Vice Chair Williams shared the announcement of the New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions Annual Meeting. Mr. Milliken said there had been good representation in the past. Mr. Bergman attended in the past, but he would not be this year; he suggested signing up for specific sessions in advance. Mr. Haynes noted there was money available in the Commission's Budget to cover the Meeting's registration fee for interested Commissioners. Mr. Bill commented on this year's speaker being a forester, who recommends replacing all beech trees with more viable species: Ethan Tapper, author of *How to Love a Forest*. Vice Chair Williams said something would replace the beeches (i.e., hopefully it would not be burning bush or knotweed) if they were not manually/intentionally replaced.

D) Outreach

Mr. Bill would be leading a glacial geology walk at Goose Pond on October 25, 2025.

5) New or Other Business

Vice Chair Williams reported that east side Keene citizens were concerned about the trees selected for Pat Russell Park, specifically the fruitless flowering crab apples. He wondered if the Conservation Commission had any opinion on this. Anecdotally, Mr. Bill reported having a crab apple tree that had bloomed every year except this year, in addition to a 100 year plus old apple tree that did not fruit this year. He heard something about the pollinators being unable to reach them during a rainy spring, when the fruit trees were flowering. Mr. Bergman asked if honeybees or bumblebees are native to crab apple trees. Mr. Therriault said both, they will pollinate what is within their zone. Honeybees travel approximately two miles and bumblebees about one half mile; other bees, like most ground nesting species, have much smaller zones.

Mr. Bergman said the fruiting variety would be ideal to attract birds and fertilize the soil. He asked the other concerns. Vice Chair Williams said not producing enough pollen for the pollinators. Mr. Therriault said a lot of the newest varieties actually advertise low pollen for people with allergy sensitivities; he said the trees look nice but do not actually do anything for anyone. Vice Chair Williams agreed that one thought was wanting birds to be able to eat crab apples. Discussion ensued briefly about species that enjoy eating crab apples. Vice Chair Williams noted the neighbors were also concerned that oaks were not being selected for planting in Pat Russell Park. He knew the City was looking for fast growing trees, which oaks are not. However, he said it is hard to find a tree that hosts more different species than an oak.

Mr. Bill asked who decides what trees are planted. Vice Chair Williams said the Public Works Department, specifically the Highway Manager. The current selections were: two fruitless flowering crabapples, two autumn flame maples, one elm, one majestic maple, three parkland birches, one weeping cherry, two balsam firs, and three blue spruces. Commissioners questioned whether they would be native maples and asked if these trees were all already planted. Mr. Milliken confirmed that majestic maple is a red maple. Vice Chair Williams said he worries about fancy cultivars. Vice Chair Williams believed they were already planted by now because he saw some firs and spruces planted, which were not the species he would have chosen; you cannot hang out under them. He said willows were apparently not preferred but he thought they would have been nice beside the water. Vice Chair Williams noted part of the concern was not having enough shade trees, especially around the Brook for optimal species biodiversity (there was too much sun directly on the Brook).

Vice Chair Williams was unsure whether the Commission wanted to react to the situation. He recalled the City having a list of approved street trees but said these were Park trees, which is a different situation, so he wondered if there was some latitude. If the trees were planted already, Mr. Haynes asked if the Commission was making recommendations for further planting. Vice Chair Williams thought about reiterating best practices and recommending replacements if the existing trees died. He thought someone could look into the crab apple issue further to see if it was really a problem or perhaps just a one-year issue. Mr. Milliken noted the crab apple trees near School and Court Streets produced a lot of berries. Vice Chair Williams thought the City did not want that, resulting in excess fruit on the ground, attracting yellowjackets around children; he thought the City had similar reasons for oak trees and acorns on the ground.

Also on new business, Mr. Bergman first mentioned a lot of logging along the power line right-of-way on Whitcombs Mill Road. He looked into it, and the power line runs across private property. The property owner was doing the logging, which Mr. Bergman called quite extensive and not far from the Rail Trail. Second, Mr. Bergman reported on the Henry Development across from Langdon Place, where an extension was received for the work, which was underway at this time. Third, he shared with Ms. Brunner some questionable development practices occurring in West Keene. Ms. Brunner reported it to the City Engineer, who issued a violation citation and referred the matter to the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services. The matter might come before the Conservation Commission as a referral through that process. Mr. Bergman hoped the work had halted. It was not too far from where he lived. Vice Chair Williams agreed it was concerning, and it would be nice if developers got the required permits earlier, so work would not have to be halted, because it costs everyone. Mr. Bergman also noticed the gravel pit had now pulled back from its Sullivan County expansion plans, but said those applicants initially proceeded without a permit there. Vice Chair Williams thought people saw retroactive approval and paying a fine as an option, which he did not like, stating the City got a gravel pit without ever being asked if it wanted one.

Ms. Fortson shared an informational notification that a Dredge and Fill Wetlands Permit Application was issued on October 16, 2025 for Otter Brook. It involved the repair of a Tier 3 stream crossing. Ms. Fortson would share the letter, showing the 13 different conditions of approval. She read from the description of the five-year permit (applicant, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers): “Impact approximately 200 square feet, 50 linear feet or less around a concrete abutment within Otter Brook. Replacement of sandbags to create a dry work area to perform repair of the concrete abutments and wing walls at the Old Route 9 entrance bridge. Construction includes the removal of deteriorated sections of the existing parge coat from the abutments and wing walls followed by concrete patching and restoration.”

6) Adjournment

There being no further business, Vice Chair Williams adjourned the meeting at 5:54 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katryna Kibler, Minute Taker
October 27, 2025

Reviewed and edited by,
Megan Fortson, Planner & Mari Brunner, Senior Planner