

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELLOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, December 9, 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,
Parks & Recreation Director

Members Not Present:

Thomas Haynes, Alternate

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Bocko called the meeting to order at 8:15 AM. Roll call was conducted.

2) Approval of October 14, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Ms. Mathews stated that she wished the meeting minutes had more details of their conversations, particularly where line 38 says “Discussion ensued about the watering.”

Other ARPAB members gave the following corrections to the meeting minutes:

Line 163 – the speaker was Ms. Casey, not Ms. Cook.
Line 33 – the correct spelling is “drought,” not “draught.”
Line 127 – “Dawn Redwood” should be capitalized.

Ms. Cook made a motion to approve the October 14, 2025 meeting minutes as amended. Ms. Casey seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Friends of Ashuelot River Park Arboretum Report

Ms. Mathews stated that she belongs to the Garden Conservancy, which is a nationwide group, and they had an ad for Bartlett Tree. She continued that she brought it today, thinking the

ARPAB would be interested in seeing it. She also has the Town of Rindge's newsletter, which shows that bats roost in trees, which she did not know.

Ms. Mathews reported the following:

- The Friends are off duty, but are doing a lot of planning, which is one of the reasons they need to talk so much about watering and drought.
- She is the Friends' interim director. She has now served two terms of two years each, which the bylaws say is the maximum, but they do not have anyone to step up, so they are amending the bylaws to say that in times of necessity, the current director may continue for a year so that someone may be found. The bylaws do not say a person cannot return in the future.
- The Friends are talking about different fundraisers. They will pursue smaller grants that do not require a match.
- They are working to find a new meeting space.
- They will not meet in January.

Ms. Mathews stated that one of the biggest issues for the Friends is water. Considering that there is a lot of drought every summer, "Little old ladies with a wagon and milk jugs is just criminal." They are volunteers, with limited time, and unraveling 200 feet of hose is challenging. They were going to sink some in the ground, but that itself would be a big project. She thinks they should get a group together to talk about the water issues, because there must be something they can do.

Chair Bocko stated that the idea of a snap valve came up last month. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that that would be really challenging, because of how they would have to pull up the irrigation system. Ms. Mathews asked if they could add another zone. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that she can find out what that would look like.

Ms. Mathews gave a proposed location for an additional faucet. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that something else they were thinking of was maybe something like a rain/collection barrel for the Friends. Ms. Mathews replied that they did that, with a rain barrel near Starbucks. She continued that it lasted about two weeks before some man put it on his truck and drove away with it. Then they put one by the shed, but people kept emptying it. There was no leak; it just got emptied. Ms. Casey added that at that time, the only source of water in the park was underground, and the Friends had no access. Ms. Mathews replied that that is when they built the above ground tap with a lock, which someone sheared off the summer before last.

Ms. Mathews stated that they really need to talk with Bartlett, about the trees, maybe while they are walking around the park doing things. She continued that some of the trees are at the height of their maturity and need to be cared for or else they will not last. The question is how much drought trees can put up with, and how much water they need. For example, whether they need two hours every week or every two weeks. Mr. Winsor replied that this year, he did notice lots of

drought. Ms. Mathews replied particularly with the Dogwood. Mr. Winsor agreed, and continued that if the drought was really bad, someone would need to go around with the hose. Ms. Mathews replied that instead, they could just leave the hose there. Mr. Winsor stated that this was the first year he had seen serious effects of drought on trees. Ms. Mathews replied that they might want to mark out which species to be most concerned about. Mr. Winsor replied that he never thought they would have to worry about oaks. Ms. Mathews stated that some of the arboretum's species will not survive what is coming.

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey proposed inviting Frank "Pepper" Anderson and Brett Oullette to the January meeting. She will ask that they bring what is currently in existence, and they can talk about it. Ms. Mathews replied that that would be great.

Mr. Winsor stated that if there is nothing permanent that can be done, there are underground hose reels that are possible to use. He continued that it would still be a hose, but not as laborious as it is now. Ms. Mathews replied that they could have a hose reel closer to the back. Mr. Winsor replied yes, and he thinks it could be locked. He continued that before the next meeting, he will look into the underground hose option as a possible temporary solution. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that the Community Garden has a rain collection tank, which is like a very large bucket with a spigot. Ms. Casey stated that it would have to have a pressure head on it, because with the rain barrel, it took about five minutes to fill a watering can.

Ms. Mathews asked everyone to keep thinking of ideas between now and the next meeting. Maybe they will find something that will work.

Ms. Casey reminded the ARPAB to let the Friends know if they have ideas for new Friends members. Mr. Winsor asked how many new members they could have. Ms. Casey replied five more, maximum, per the bylaws. Mr. Winsor stated that they could recruit at upcoming events and workshops hosted by similar groups, such as the flyer presented for the East Keene Neighborhood group's upcoming event at the Library. Ms. Mathews asked Councilor Haas to keep his ears open.

Chair Bocko thanked the Friends for the report and thanked Ms. Fisk-Hennessey for thinking about bringing in the crew.

4) Finance Report

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that the ARBAB used \$3,922 for Bartlett Tree. She continued that that was for the root invigoration, pruning, and diagnosis work done in the fall.

Ms. Mathews stated that she has a suggestion regarding Bartlett Tree. She continued that they were talking about doing soil testing, and the Friends need to do soil testing for the pollinator garden. Maybe the Friends could do another sample and send it in to UNH, which costs much less than Bartlett charges. Mr. Winsor replied that Bartlett tests for different things, for trees. He

continued that Bartlett has its own lab in North Carolina. The test might be more extensive than the one UNH does. There is a reason for the cost. Ms. Mathews stated that the Friends want to find out what might amend the soil for moisture retention. Mr. Winsor replied that compost would be good for that.

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that she thanks the ARPAB for agreeing to use some of the landscaping funds to take down the Siberian Elm. She continued that the total cost was \$2,750. The Dawn Redwood is heeling, out by the cemetery barn. Mr. Winsor stated that Mr. Anderson was very helpful. He continued that his team heeled it in with a bunch of wood chips and had been watering it until it got really cold. The hold up in planting it was that the City's loader was tied up with other things. Thus, planting the tree will be work for the early spring. He wants to work with the parks team before they get too busy with the spring work. They have been great.

Ms. Mathews stated that she forgot to mention something during the update from the Friends. She continued that the Friends have been talking for years about getting a landscape designer, since none of them have that accreditation. She got an email from a woman who just moved to the area with a degree in landscape design. This woman is hot for a project, joined the Monadnock Garden Club, and wants to be the liaison between the Friends, the park, and the Monadnock Garden Club. She really wants a project, and the Friends have one for her. She met this woman at the park, and they walked around for an hour and talked about it. First, they did the whole bed where the Siberian Elm was coming down and talked about how so much might be harmed. The Friends have cut so much out of there, like the honeysuckles, although there might be two ancient lilacs. This woman was also looking at the Boxwood, talking about how they really need help. She is very excited. They invited her to the next Friends meeting, and Ms. Mathews will invite her to an ARPAB meeting, too, once the tree is in. It is great to have someone who knows what she is doing and has good ideas.

Mr. Winsor stated that Phil's Tree Service saved all the grindings and put them right back in the hole so they can use them when they replant the tree. He continued that Phil's Tree Service was really cooperative, too. The whole process of the tree being taken down went very well, although he was hoping to get the new tree in this fall.

A) Calendar Year Budget (Trustees)

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that she would remind everyone that they are on a calendar year budget, even though it does not feel like it, because this one was approved in June. This is a six-month budget. At the ARPAB's next meeting, they need to start thinking about what the calendar year budget will look like, so she can get that info to the Trustees and they can work through that process much sooner than they did last time. They should look at what they have spent in the past 6 months and identify calendar year budget ideas for January. They need to talk about where to allocate funding, what kinds of projects to put in those lines, and move forward from there. She should get it to the Trustees in mid-January if possible.

Ms. Casey stated that herbicide treatment was done. She asked why that is not reflected as an expense in the Finance Report. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that herbicide treatment was a collaboration between the Public Works Department and the Parks and Recreation Department. She continued that it came from the Public Works budget. The number of spaces the Parks and Recreation Department have that need herbicide treatment is not nearly as large as the other City spaces. ARPAB members replied that it is great that the Public Works budget took care of it.

Ms. Mathews asked if that map is available on the website. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied no, there is no map for this online. She continued that it was the first time doing the herbicide application this way, and City staff went around with the vegetation control service and identified all of the different locations, and the company gave the City a quote. Ms. Mathews asked if she and others who spend time out in the woods could give input about the locations. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied yes, if they are larger-scale spaces and places.

Mr. Winsor asked if there is a new landscaper to replace the previous one. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied it is the crew from Parks and Recreation. Ms. Mathews replied that it is great.

Chair Bocko asked that the ARPAB members, between now and January, think about the budget, talk about it, maybe send Ms. Fisk-Hennessey thoughts, or bring thoughts to the January meeting. He continued that he and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey can draft something for consideration, based on that.

Ms. Casey asked if they had an idea of what money might be available for the budget. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that they can carry over anything they have not spent. She continued that the goal is between \$10,000 to \$14,000, total each year. Chair Bocko stated that people can keep that in mind, and if they have thoughts, send an email to him and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey and they can discuss it.

Ms. Mathews asked if water is something they should talk about prior, in case it becomes a budget item. She continued that she does not want it to be laid aside continuously. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that she should bring that forward to her and Chair Bocko, and then when Mr. Anderson and Mr. Oullette come, they can begin discussions around planning and actual costs.

5) Project Tracking
A) Sign Development Draft Review

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that she has something to share with the ARPAB today—drafts of the permanent sign development. Former staff, Nicole Cullinane, drafted a simple layout before she left the City. She continued that the college intern then went wild with the timeline and photos. Ms. Fisk Hennessey distributed hard copy drafts. The intern fit the entire timeline at the bottom. They can cut down on the number of words, cut down on the superfluous information, and figure out what they really want it to look like. Canva does not have spell check, so there are some misspellings in the drafts.

Chair Bocko asked if they had decided to take out the stuff going back to geologic times. Mr. Winsor replied that he thought they had decided to take that out. Others agreed. Chair Bocko replied that he is fine with it, because this is the park history, rather than the land history. He continued that however, he remembers they had decided not to add stuff to honor Indigenous peoples' history. There is a lot of work to do there, although Indigenous people were not involved with the park.

Chair Bocko asked if this document shows the elements but is not the actual layout. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that it is a draft. She continued that they can move things around, take things out, and add things. Chair Bocko stated that he loves all the photos, but they have text to include, too. Ms. Mathews replied that they had a whole history they were going to include, paragraphs, with a QR code. She continued that the timeline was to go along the bottom. Chair Bocko stated that maybe some of the photos go on the back. Ms. Mathews replied that they could go right above the timeline. Chair Bocko stated that the rail trail's sign is a model. He continued that it has the park name, then text, with a couple pictures. The timeline is important, but he remembers that it was different. Mr. Winsor and Ms. Mathews replied yes, a separate strip on the bottom.

Chair Bocko stated that this is great progress. Others agreed. Ms. Mathews stated that she thinks Ms. Fisk-Hennessey has not seen the history portion. She asked if it is available to send to her. Mr. Winsor replied yes, he can send it to her. Ms. Mathews stated that there was a particular section they wanted on the front. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey asked if the idea was to have the text interspersed with the photos, on the front of the sign. Ms. Mathews and Mr. Winsor replied yes.

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey asked if the timeline is separate. Mr. Winsor replied yes, but he thinks the photos are descriptive of the timeline, too. He continued that he understands why this is laid out the way it is, but there are some very important photographs. For example, people do not know that Barry Faulkner was involved and a big proponent of the park, and Mr. Kingsbury. The photo of Chuck Simpson and Jeanna Hamblet should definitely be used. They can revisit this and see if they want it to be part of the timeline or the main sign. Those are things they struggled with before and still struggle with. However, this is great progress, and great to see.

Ms. Casey stated that the timeline does not need to be labeled as such, because it is obvious what it is. She continued that "Ashuelot River Park" should maybe be more prominent. Discussion ensued about how to maybe label or number the photos. Ms. Krautmann asked how large the sign would be. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that rough measurements are 30 inches x 60 inches. Ms. Casey stated that the timeline does not need to be written in complete sentences, just bullets. Others agreed.

Chair Bocko stated that he thinks the ARPAB had some layouts. Others agreed. Ms. Mathews replied that she has a folder with layouts, which she will send to Ms. Fisk-Hennessey. Ms. Cook asked if it says on here when the trees were planted. Mr. Winsor replied the fall of 1990. He continued that some of the photos are from newspaper clippings. Ms. Krautmann stated that the Historical Society has all of the photos. Ms. Mathews replied that the Friends have a lot of them,

too. Ms. Cook asked if it is true that the car wash was still there in 1996 when they were still planting trees. Mr. Winsor replied yes, the park was behind the car wash. Discussion continued.

Chair Bocko asked if there is an action plan for this. He continued that for one thing, Ms. Mathews will get the layouts to Ms. Fisk-Hennessey. Mr. Winsor replied that they will get Ms. Fisk-Hennessey the narrative, too. Chair Bocko replied that he himself should do that. He asked Ms. Fisk-Hennessey if the college intern is continuing. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that she will be able to continue this. Chair Bocko stated that this draft gives him great hope, and he can see how it can work, with the timeline in a different place and shortened, and photos interspersed with text. He continued that they will need to think about the back, and how to divide that up. There are the Friends, Antioch University, the Rachel Marshall Outdoor Learning Lab, and so on and so forth.

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey asked if someone can give an overview of the different garden clubs that exist in the area. Ms. Mathews stated that the United States has federated garden clubs. She continued that in the park, the Monadnock Garden Club is from Garden Clubs of America, and the Old Homestead Garden Club is from the Federated Garden Clubs of America. The Old Homestead Garden Club is based in Swanzey, and the Monadnock Garden Club is based in Keene, and “ne’er the twain shall meet,” although she has tried. That is why she is so excited about this landscape designer she met. When the park was first established, Jeana Hamblet was the president of the Old Homestead Garden Club and got the entire club behind her. She does not know what happened. The women she spoke to in the garden club said that one day they were gardening (in the park) and someone they did not know came through and said, “You don’t need to do this anymore. We’re taking care of it.” And that ended it. No one fought it or questioned it. She does not know exactly what happened. At some point, Ms. Hamblet stopped being the president of the Old Homestead Garden Club and joined the Monadnock Garden Club. She herself has no idea what happened in between. Ms. Hamblet ran the Friends for many years.

Chair Bocko stated that regarding the narrative that Mr. Winsor wrote, he and Ms. Krautmann ran it by Ms. Hamblet, and Ms. Hamblet did not say anything about it needing changes. Ms. Krautmann replied yes, she thinks Ms. Hamblet was going to use it for the Monadnock Garden Club. She told Ms. Hamblet to call Ms. Mathews. Ms. Mathews replied yes, she and Ms. Hamblet did speak, and she told Ms. Hamblet the Monadnock Garden Club cannot keep functioning unless they have a copy of the Master Plan. She told Ms. Hamblet she (Ms. Mathews) needs to give the Monadnock Garden Club a copy of the Master Plan so they understand why the Friends are planting what they are planting and how the park is going forward. She gave it to the landscape designer, and wrote on the top, “Copy for the Monadnock Garden Club.” The landscape designer was going to read it so she knows where she is going and then share it with Ms. Hamblet.

Ms. Casey stated that at one point, different groups were assigned different beds to take care of. She stated that there was a list of all the different individuals and groups, including garden clubs and sororities, and their assignments. Ms. Mathews replied that that had always been the case.

Mr. Winsor replied that he himself had an assigned bed. He continued that anyone who was not keeping up with their assigned bed would get a phone call from Ms. Hamblet, who would reassign the bed if necessary. Discussion continued about bed assignments and people involved. Chair Bocko asked if it is correct that the volunteer assignments were managed by the Friends. Ms. Mathews replied yes, it was initially done by the Monadnock Garden Club, and then the Friends took it over. She continued that Ms. Hamblet was the Friends chair. Ms. Casey stated that there was still the rogue person who would plant a shrub, or the rogue pruner. Ms. Mathews stated that there is a rogue weeder who comes in on the Jonathan Daniels Trail and just rips things out, including asters, which the person might think is ragweed. Mr. Winsor replied that that is vandalism. Ms. Mathews replied that the Friends choose not to use the word "vandalism" and say "the rogue weeder" instead, because they think the person is trying to help. Ms. Casey stated that someone pruned a big lilac bush into a "lollipop" shape. Discussion continued about how the Friends do not know who this person is, but they ask the people who do work in the park to keep an eye out. Ms. Casey stated that what she was trying to get at is that once the Master Plan for the park came online, that obviates anyone working independently. They have to be working with the Friends and they have to be working toward the goals of the Master Plan. No individual is permitted to do anything in the park on their own. Ms. Mathews stated that she gave the sorority a copy of the Master Plan, so they know what they are doing.

Chair Bocko stated that they need to move on with the agenda, but they can put something on a future agenda if need be. He continued that Ms. Fisk-Hennessey brought up the clubs and the interactions. He asked if there is something the ARPAB needs to follow up on, or if that was information gathering. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that it was information gathering. Chair Bocko stated that he thinks it is more an issue for the Friends than the ARPAB, but he asked if they are organizing around having assignments for beds, or if that has dissipated. Ms. Mathews replied no, they discovered there are not enough people to do that. She continued that the Friends walk around and see what needs work and they all target it and get the job done, then move on to the next job on the list. Ms. Krautmann asked if the Friends want the groups to do that. Ms. Mathews replied that they can stay in their assigned areas, as long as they understand what the Master Plan is dictating, and do that. Ms. Cook stated that she understands that Ms. Mathews is giving out copies of the Master Plan, but her question is how to make sure that the various groups understand and follow the rules. Ms. Mathews replied that they need to come to a board meeting and sit and talk about it. Ms. Cook asked how the groups know who the boss is. Mr. Winsor replied that there is the ARPAB. He continued that they can come to the ARPAB. Ms. Mathews suggested they invite people to these meetings.

Ms. Krautmann stated that one of the garden clubs has an area that seems to have an Asian or Oriental theme. Ms. Mathews replied that that was years ago, and they need to move forward. Ms. Krautmann replied that she thinks the group is sensitive about that. Ms. Mathews replied that she understands that, and she does not think she will tell them to pull everything out. She continued that as far as she is concerned, they can keep what they have done, but they need to understand that they cannot go in and use a certain kind of mulch that does not match anything

else. It is one, big garden. Ms. Cook replied yes, and they have to be careful about plants that are invasive.

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that this discussion is bringing two things to mind. She continued that the first is, Parks and Recreation staff recently had a meeting with the Greater Goose Pond Stewardship Committee and the New England Mountain Bike Association (NEMBA), because staff are concerned about trail density in Keene forests. NEMBA is a remarkable group to work with, and they have been fantastic with City parks and trails. They built and maintain the bike park and improve-maintain the trails in the woods. They do have a couple of rogue members who just decide to build trails in the woods, so they had a conversation about what the City would like to see moving forward - NEMBA members cannot just go out and build. It was suggested that they flag different areas and present their ideas to the City why they think those locations are important, and the City can do the impact study of what would take place. Also, they want to make sure they are preserving the ecological habitats and homes for wildlife. Parks and Recreation staff also have stated that if there are unapproved trails in there that are having negative effects, staff will have to take those trails apart.

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey continued that second, the City is re-envisioning the Spirit of Place initiative that was in effect in the early 2010s. They will have a central location of volunteers on the City's website, where people can say what they are interested in volunteering for, such as park beautification, trail maintenance, or youth sports coaching. Once all of their information is there, and they have filled out all the forms and liability paperwork, the City departments will get the contact information for the people who have expressed interest in volunteering in those areas, and they can move forward with the projects that are established and waiting for volunteers. ARPAB members spoke positively about this Spirit of Place reenvisioning.

Chair Bocko stated that it sounds like the Friends are thinking about the beds and the rogue work that is happening, and he assumes those discussions are part of the Friends' meetings. He continued that they can bring it to the ARPAB as needed.

6) Recent/Upcoming Events

Chair Bocko asked Mr. Winsor how the event that he led went, the bird walk/tree walk for seniors. Mr. Winsor replied that it was fun. He continued that eight or nine people came and it went well. They walked around and talked about a lot of things, and people were very engaged. It was more of a community group than a senior group. He loves to give tree tours. Chair Bocko asked if he worked in tandem with the Antioch student, or if they split the group. Mr. Winsor replied that the Antioch student came and helped with the talk. He continued that the students are wealth of information, and throws in a lot of biology, which is good. Chair Bocko stated that the Antioch student had been recruited to give a bird walk while Mr. Winsor did the tree walk, and it sounds like it morphed into a combo with both at once. Mr. Winsor replied that it was interesting, and the Antioch student helped him out a lot.

Chair Bocko stated that they have a flyer today for an insect event at the Library, next Tuesday night.

7) New/Other Business

Chair Bocko asked if there was any new business.

8) Adjourn – Next Meeting Scheduled for Tuesday, January 13, 2026

There being no further business, Chair Bocko adjourned the meeting at 9:13 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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