City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Monday, December 15, 2025 **5:00 PM** **Room 22, Recreation Center**

Members Present:
Councilor Andrew Madison, Chair (arrived at 5:05 PM)
Councilor Robert Williams, Vice Chair
Art Walker
Steven Bill
Barbara Richter
Gary Flaherty
Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Alternate (Voting)
Ken Bergman, Alternate (Voting until 5:05 PM)
Thomas Haynes, Alternate
John Therriault, Alternate

Staff Present:
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner

Members Not Present:
Katie Kinsella
Bob Milliken, Alternate

SITE VISIT: At 3:45 PM, prior to the meeting, a quorum of Commissioners conducted a site visit at 454 Elm Street (TMP #521-004-000).

1) Call to Order

Vice Chair Williams called the meeting to order at 5:01 PM.

The Commission discussed membership and renominations under New Business.

2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – November 17, 2025

Revision: line 154, change the word "was" to "is."

A motion by Mr. Von Plinsky to adopt the November 17, 2025 meeting minutes as amended was duly seconded by Mr. Bergman and the motion carried unanimously.

3) <u>Planning Board Referral:</u>

A) <u>PB-2025-29</u> – Cottage Court CUP, Surface Water Protection CUP, & Major Site Plan – Applicant Fieldstone Land Consultants, on behalf of owners Paul Chester & Gail Marie Dubriske, proposes to redevelop the property at 454 Elm St. (TMP# 521-004-000) into a Cottage Court Development with 18 single family dwellings. A surface water protection CUP is requested for ~1,435 sf of impact within the 30-foot wetland buffer. The parcel is ~2.3 ac in size and is in the Low Density District.

Vice Chair Williams welcomed John Noonan with Fieldstone Land Consultants on behalf of the property owners, Paul Chester & Gail Marie Dubriske. Mr. Noonan explained the plan to relocate a driveway kitty corner to Timberlane Drive. He showed the existing driveway on a map. He showed the relocation plan to come into the development with a 20-foot-wide private driveway, ending in a hammerhead that would allow emergency vehicles to turn around. The applicant had submitted a Turning Exhibit to the Planning Board (PB), showing that the Keene ladder truck would be able to turn around with this plan.

Chair Madison arrived at 5:05 PM.

Mr. Noonan also showed the Commission a driveway that would extend to service the last three homes. Each house was shown with a driveway that holds one car and a garage on each home would hold another car. Basically, he said each home is a dwelling unit, which is also a condo unit. There are no property lines, and nothing divided. It would be a condominium within a homeowner's association that would maintain driveway plowing and utilities that are not City-owned. The water and sewer would be City-owned utilities, with an easement granted to the City of Keene for the municipal water extension infrastructure from Elm Street and the sewer infrastructure extended from Elm Street.

As discussed on the site walk, Mr. Noonan said the reason for this Surface Water Protection Conditional Use Permit (CUP) was the wetland (shown in blue on a map) that is created from topography runoff, in addition to a culvert under the lowest point of Franklin Pierce Highway indirectly causing runoff from the Highway into the wetland. He said the applicant was looking at a wetland buffer impact and requesting a reduced buffer for the property down to 10 feet around the wetland resource, which he showed. Ultimately, Mr. Noonan said the impacts would not be to the 10-foot buffer but would be to the original 30-foot buffer with grading, erosion controls, tree cutting, and stormwater management. Stormwater management would always have to be maintained as a permanent impact, and to maintain it, Mr. Noonan said trees would have to be cut down and it would remain a grassy area.

Mr. Noonan explained the various site plan sheets, beginning with the Grading Plan, and showed a rendering of the property's high point. He shared the plan to take runoff from right behind the back of two houses at the rear of the site to a level spreader. Runoff infiltrates into the level spreader, which detains the rainwater, spreads it out slightly, and guides in each direction along a

berm on the downhill side to the wetland area. He showed how the remaining grading would basically be pitched all the way down to the front at Elm Street, with stormwater management on each side of the driveway. Mr. Noonan demonstrated the location of an existing stormwater pond along Elm Street. with an outlet structure directing runoff toward a culvert into a catch basin. He said the applicant's plan was to mimic that pond, making it a little bit larger on each side of the driveway and based off of the amount of proposed impervious surfaces. An outlet structure would allow water to build up, be stored, and be treated. Mr. Noonan showed the property line, where a swale would collect and treat rainwater until it arrives at the catch basin and outlet structure that ties into the existing pipe, which would remain.

Next, Mr. Noonan showed the Site Plan, with the outline of homes for the Cottage Court overlay, the reduced setbacks, and the total property (outlined in orange). The submitted Existing Conditions showed the existing contours and site features of the property, such as stone walls, wetlands, the existing house and garage, site items around the property (the existing neighbor's garage was the closest structure), and Timberlane Drive. The applicant also submitted a Condominium Site Plan that would ultimately go to the Attorney General's Office and then be recorded with the City and Cheshire County. The Condominium Site Plan considers things Mr. Noonan pointed out during the Site Visit such as limited common areas, which is an outline area around the home that would be purchased and owned as a part of the condo; it is the yard around it but is not a property line.

Mr. Noonan showed the Grading and Drainage Plan and how the proposed contours would tie into the existing contours. He recalled that almost everything would be pitched to the front of the site. It would be similar to the existing scenario, other than that the applicant proposed intercepting runoff that currently runs onto the neighboring property and redirecting it with a swale along the edge of the property, so nothing could flow off the property in other directions, as he showed on plans. He said everything would be brought to the front of the property, except the high point at the back of the property, which would be brough to a stormwater area. Mr. Noonan also showed erosion control measures: (1) temporary construction catch basins at the front of the site, with silk socks placed in them to catch sediment that would be cleaned and maintained until the basins are removed at the end of construction; (2) the proposed driveway would have a stabilized 23-inch stone construction entrance, so that any traffic construction traffic leaving do not track soil and silt, etc., onto the City roads; (3) silt fences surrounding most of the property and on the downhill side; and (4) biodegradable erosion control matting would be left in place anywhere there is 3:1 grading or steeper, which allows the grass to grow through it, stabilize itself, and the matting degrades.

Mr. Noonan showed the Plan for and Profile of the road, water, sewer, and drainage structures across the site. He showed the high, backside point of the site at 7% slope and pitching down to 4.5% at the front of the site. At the Site Visit, Mr. Noonan was asked how much cut and fill was proposed. He replied that all of the cutting would be at the high point of the knoll in the back where the Commission stood during the Site Visit, and the filling would all be at the lower point, which he demonstrated on the Plan.

Next, Mr. Noonan presented the Utility Plan, showing an outline of all the site's proposed underground utilities: water, sewer, drainage, and transformers and electrical structures. He also showed a Landscaping Plan, with the proposed limit of cutting along the extents of the property. Mr. Noonan showed where the proposed tree line would extend into the 30-foot buffer to just outside the 10-foot buffer and back up the hill. The majority of landscaping was proposed along the front of the property to provide a buffer and re-establish a break in screenings from cars coming down the road and a visual break from the road. Basic screening around the two transformer pads was proposed. For the Lighting Plan, Mr. Noonan described very small, full cutoff (i.e., nothing above horizontal) residential fixtures, with LED bulbs that direct light down, on the front of each house on the garage side.

Mr. Noonan continued, recalling the erosion control details: erosion control matting, biodegradable pipe, silt sock, stabilized construction entrance, silt fence, stone check dams, notes for grasses to use during replanting, and notes about times of year for these controls. He concluded by presenting some general construction details: how to build the roadway, other items to install, and the profile of the Cape Cod berm (9 inches deep, 6 inches in height total, with a 2-inch lip on the side). The remaining construction details primarily regarded drainage: ditch lines, how to install the swales, rip rap, fall outs, catch basin, grate types, and infiltration in the trenches. Mr. Noonan briefly concluded by showing the sewer and water details needed for the City's Engineering Division to review the extension of municipal service. Mr. Noonan welcomed the Commission's questions.

Mr. Von Plinsky asked Mr. Noonan to point out on the maps the existing high point of the site versus the proposed high point, which Mr. Noonan showed. Mr. Von Plinsky reiterated his misgivings that he stated during the Site Visit. He thought there would be far fewer impacts on anything if the applicant was not trying to propose as many units on the site. Mr. Von Plinsky felt like if there were only 14 units proposed on this just two-acre site, there would be essentially no impact on the buffer, the wetland, or any of the area at the back of the property. His take on the application was that he did not think it was necessary to try to do that. However, Mr. Von Plinsky said if that was how it was going to be, then he would have a few other questions.

Mr. Bill asked how many storm sewers were proposed and where. Mr. Noonan replied that most would be overland flow through drainage swales and he showed where on the sides of the plans. Mr. Bill asked if the swales would only be on the sides. Mr. Noonan recalled that the site would drain down and showed how each side would curve and drain down to the two catch basins and outlets, with a head wall. There would also be a catch basin system at the front entryway, so the stormwater areas connect. Mr. Bill said he is not an engineer but that a plan to have the property as 45% impermeable surfaces seemed like a lot of surfaces to shed water into relatively limited drainage. He asked whether Mr. Noonan had figures showing that the flow of the 25-year flood or greater would be reduced in the proposed development. Mr. Noonan said the applicant submitted their Stormwater Management Report, showing how all this would be offset, including: infiltration and drip strips around the roofs (4-foot deep, 1.5-in gravel strips around the homes) to allow runoff from the roofs to pool for a limited time; swales running across overland structures, down to the front, and picked up by two catch basins and pitched out; items

from the high point swale go to a level spreader; everything directed to the two pond areas would be held and an outlet structure would allow the water to build up for each storm, when there is an outlet at elevations that correlate with those storms (i.e., 2, 10, 25, and 50-year floods). Mr. Bill wondered if this pond would be designed to handle 6 inches of rain in a few hours, for example. Mr. Noonan said this would be a 24-year design, which estimates a certain amount of rainfall over a 24-hour period based on Cornell University's extreme precipitation levels for each storm, which were listed in the applicant's report. Mr. Bill wondered if Mr. Noonan knew the estimated rainfall of a 50-year storm in 24 hours, noting those storms were growing common in the Keene area, so he thought a plan should be able to accommodate them. Mr. Noonan thought the 50-year storm was approximately 7.2 inches in 24 hours.

Chair Madison asked where the pond would eventually discharge to when it fills up. Mr. Noonan showed where there would be a concrete outlet structure, which is similar to a catch basin; the outlet would tie into the municipal catch basin. He also showed where the existing stormwater along the street went directly into a 12-inch culvert and into the municipal catch basin. He explained that the existing culvert does not carry as much water now as would go through the proposed outlet's control device. Ultimately, Mr. Noonan said the outlet would tie into the municipal catch basin, which goes to the next catch basin, and then to the wetland downstream by Cheshire Medical Center. Chair Madison asked if there would be any pathways for runoff from the Highway into this proposed neighborhood; specifically, what is the elevation difference between the [Route 9/10/12] road surface and the back of Units 6 and 7? Mr. Noonan cited an elevation of 530 feet on Route 9 and 536 feet to 540 feet closer to Units 6 and 7, but noted there is a berm between the highway and the property line.

Mr. Bergman asked if the section of chain link fence was elevated above the Highway. Mr. Noonan said the area Mr. Bergman pointed out was a swale draining back down to a 24-inch culvert and into the wetland that flows down by all the complexes that come together toward Court Street by Cheshire Medical Center.

Mr. Haynes noted that the City requires planning for a 50-year flood but said it should be looking at 100-year floods because they were happening more often than not. His big concern was Keene's springtime events. Chair Madison agreed that Keene had been seeing a lot more heavy spring precipitation events, while there is still snow on the ground, so the snowmelt during warm fronts compounds the rain events. He was concerned about the stormwater structures at the end of Elm Court becoming a little overwhelmed, in addition to what would be coming off of Timberlane Drive, noting the pretty strong risk for ponding at that intersection already. So, he thought there would be some risks for the homeowners across the street, not to mention the school on the other side of the Highway. Those were Chair Madison's primary concerns. Mr. Noonan replied that at this time, the City of Keene required planning for the 25-year storm as the standard, and Fieldstone Land Consultants always turned in plans for 2, 10, 25, and 50 years because that is the State of New Hampshire standard. He explained that at this time, planning for the 100-year storm was only required for a wetland stream crossing (e.g., bridge or box culvert). Regarding detention, he said anything was usually overdesigned and it was rare to see a detention basin overfilling a spillway.

Mr. Bergman asked how big the new culvert under the driveway would be. Mr. Noonan described the 12-inch outlet structure, the 12-inch culvert under the driveway, and catch basins on each side. Mr. Bergman asked if it would be a 12-inch pipe or flat-bottomed culvert. Mr. Noonan said a smooth bore inside, black corrugated plastic HDPE pipe, with precast concrete walls on each side, so the edge of the culvert would basically be flush with the concrete block. Mr. Bergman noted that some of those new units would be right next to the stormwater catchment area and asked if there was any concern about safety or hazard for little children or elderly people. Mr. Noonan said those stormwater management areas would only have water in them during a major storm event, and even then, he said they would fill and drain.

Ms. Richter asked if the applicant would be creating the catch basin to the west at the bottom of the hill toward the lower slope. Mr. Noonan said yes, the catch basin at the end of the hammerhead driveway turnaround near the last two houses. Ms. Richter asked where the overflow would be for that retention basin. Mr. Noonan showed where it would flow over the spillway of a berm, which spreads the overflow out over a wider surface. Ms. Richter said that it looked pretty steep down to that retention basin. Mr. Noonan said that spot flattened out somewhat, citing it at 3:1 on maps with a 2-foot contour. Ms. Richter said it looked steeper to her and that water would be running down. Mr. Noonan said 3:1 was on the verge of being mobile; at this time, it was the State of New Hampshire standard as not being a steep slope. He explained the purpose of erosion control matting to stabilize steep slopes until vegetation is established. Ms. Richter asked if trees are prohibited in detention basins. Mr. Noonan said that is correct. Mr. Bill asked if that area would be mowed. Mr. Noonan said there could be some weed whacking or brush left, but woody vegetation is not allowed, so you do not lose volume. Mr. Flaherty asked if the applicant planned to use a conservation mix for reseeding the grass where the trees cannot grow. Mr. Noonan said yes. He showed the lawn areas versus the 3:1 slopes and said the conservation grass mix was listed in the applicant's erosion control measures.

Chair Madison asked how much material would be removed from the existing built-up area near the proposed Unit 7. Mr. Noonan showed where a cut would occur because of the existing house and how there would end up being an approximately 5.5-foot-tall retaining wall; likely natural stone but whether it is true ledge would be unclear until excavation.

Mr. Von Plinsky asked the dimensions of the swale on the north end of the property. Mr. Noonan said that at 3:1 grade, approximately 6 feet wide and 1-foot deep. Mr. Von Plinsky said there would be 10 feet from the back of each house to the property line, so the six feet of swale would be in the middle of a 10-foot-wide space. Mr. Noonan said yes. He and Mr. Von Plinsky agreed that the back yard would essentially be a grass swale.

Mr. Von Plinsky recalled that the applicant proposed developing the lot as 45% impervious surface and confirmed that it meant 45% of the entire lot (i.e., impervious surface / entire lot). Mr. Noonan said that was correct. Mr. Von Plinsky thought the percentage was higher in actuality because the wetland area was not being improved or developed and asked Mr. Noonan if that was correct. Mr. Noonan said that was correct and showed two portions of the lot on the

map, one part that he said counted toward the pervious surfaces and one that he said counted toward the impervious surfaces (i.e., houses and porches). Mr. Von Plinsky thought under this scenario, the developed area of the lot that would drain toward Elm Street would be closer to 60% impervious. Mr. Noonan said if they separated the undeveloped (wetland) portion of the lot from the developed portion of the map, it was correct that there would be more than 45% impervious surface. Mr. Von Plinsky said that was concerning. Mr. Noonan said that it was taken into account in the design and drainage model: what would flow where and how much impervious surface goes in each area.

Mr. Haynes recalled when the Commission discussed a Gunn Road parcel one year or so prior and was unwilling to reduce the Surface Water Protection Buffer. In this instance, he said the Commission was being asked to reduce the buffer and he was concerned that it was not the right decision. Mr. Haynes knew that every site and application would be different, but he was concerned that reducing the buffer was leading the Commission in the wrong direction. Ms. Brunner clarified whether Mr. Haynes would prefer a more traditional Conditional Use Permit (CUP) just for the area shown on the plan. Mr. Haynes was less familiar with those specific details but knew the Commission was uncomfortable reducing the buffer for another project, which was eventually not approved by the Planning Board. He was concerned that it was a precedent of sorts. Vice Chair Williams saw the difference in this instance as a lot more houses being developed, so there would be more public benefit, which he said essentially enables infill. Whereas his problem with the previously denied project was that it was basically putting a driveway between two wetlands. Vice Chair Williams thought this proposal would be cutting trees, which he felt had significantly less impact.

Mr. Bergman recalled that with the Gunn Road situation, the Commission was emboldened to try defending the new buffer zone because that applicant had so much other land they could potentially have developed and chose the place with a severe wetlands buffer effect instead.

Chair Madison asked whether the Commission supported reducing the wetlands buffer for the development still under construction on Court Street near the hospital. Ms. Brunner said no; that was a CUP for the specific impacts that were shown on the plan. Mr. Haynes asked if it would make more sense to request a specific CUP in this instance. Ms. Brunner said a CUP was technically requested already and was needed whether seeking to reduce the buffer or not. However, in this one instance, the request was to reduce the Surface Water Protection Buffer for the whole property permanently. Mr. Noonan said that if the buffer reduction to 10 feet was approved, then there would be technically no buffer impact. Ms. Brunner agreed, noting he would still need the CUP, but Mr. Noonan said either way, it would be the same application.

Chair Madison asked for clarification on the two options. Ms. Brunner said that Option A would be reducing the buffer to 10 feet. Option B would be keeping the 30-foot buffer for the rest of the property with just under 1,400 square feet of impact to that buffer, and the applicant would have to return for permission to impact that 30-foot buffer again in the future. Whereas reduction to 10 feet means they could make any future impacts within that are (up to 10 feet from the wetland) without a CUP. Chair Madison asked if there was an Option C to consider. Ms. Brunner said

third option could be to have no impact on any buffers, but she did not think that was possible with this design.

Ms. Richter said the only proposed impact in the buffer zone was regrading and tree removal, so that was all the Commission would be approving. Mr. Noonan added the construction and stormwater management. In the stormwater swale, Ms. Richter said the applicant would remove trees only because they would have to regrade, and Mr. Noonan agreed. Ms. Richter asked how much of that area could be reforested and how much would need to remain a swale. Mr. Noonan pointed out where the level spreader must remain unforested. Ms. Richter asked if the buffer around the level spreader could be reforested after the regrading. Mr. Noonan thought some trees or shrubs could be planted a bit away from the level spreader, and shrubs would be better; he was concerned about trees or branches falling in the future with the house right there. Ms. Richter asked about the level spreader, in which Mr. Noonan said a small amount of water pools, spills over, and spreads out over an area; it is not designed to hold a lot of water. Mr. Bill noted that it would mostly trap sediment, and Mr. Noonan agreed that it is the reason for the proposed locations in the grass area and at the end of the paved area. Mr. Bill asked the dimensions of the level spreader basin. Mr. Noonan said the level spreader basin would be about 2 feet deep and 30 feet long, and the berm is about 40 feet long. Mr. Bill said the flow over the berm goes into the wetland and Mr. Noonan agreed.

Chair Madison's concern was that the manufactured retention pond at the end of the hammerhead turnaround would be used for snow storage based on the road layout. Mr. Noonan showed all the edges that would be plowed and said that it is a tight site for storing snow; there would not be a big piling area. Chair Madison pointed out a road arm that branched off on the plans and said there could be some areas there, but otherwise he said it looked like plow drivers would move everything to the very end of that hammerhead turnaround. Then, come spring, Chair Madison said all that water would go down into the retention area with more sediment than usual. He was worried that it might fill up more quickly with sediment than other retention ponds, in addition to issues with road salt going into the existing wetland. Mr. Noonan showed a proposed guardrail at the hammerhead turnaround, so he said they could not plow and pile much there. He said if the development were to plow to just one spot, it might have to give up the hammerhead turnaround; the other arm that Chair Madison pointed out was possible. Mr. Noonan did not think it was possible to plow to the hammerhead though, with the guardrail. Chair Madison said he had not realized a guardrail was proposed. Mr. Noonan mentioned that with the grade of the proposed development, sediment would be directed down the road toward the deep sump catch basins.

Mr. Bergman asked who would manage the swale (i.e., periodically clearing out vegetation) going down the slope, along the north margin of the plots behind the houses, to ensure it continues serving its function. Mr. Noonan said the Homeowners' Association would receive an inspection and maintenance manual from the consultant to care for these structures, such as ensuring no woody vegetation grows through them. Mr. Bergman recalled Mr. Von Plinsky asking at the Site Visit whether this buffer encroachment would be necessary if a few of the proposed units were not there. Mr. Bergman asked about what if just one of the units was

withdrawn from the left lower corner on the plan; he was unsure what it would mean for their business margin. Chair Madison specifically mentioned Unit 9. Mr. Noonan said it potentially could happen, and he looked at the grading possibilities. Chair Madison similarly thought that removing Unit 9 and repositioning Unit 8 to the left could negate the need to reduce the Surface Water Protection Buffer. Mr. Bergman agreed, adding that there would be more space. Discussion continued briefly on how the applicant would lose a unit but could save a lot of problems. Chair Madison said that he received comments from Commissioner Katie Kinsella earlier in the day, sharing this same thought.

Mr. Bill asked if there were any street trees in the plan. Ms. Richter thought a red maple was the only one. Mr. Noonan said yes, all the plantings would be at the front of the property and at the transformer locations. Mr. Noonan said that did not mean homeowners would not want to or could not plant something around their homes later. Mr. Haynes noted there was not much space proposed between the houses. Mr. Noonan said all the plantings were planned along the front yards and it was tight to be putting trees. Vice Chair Williams said there were a few spots, and he thought that if they were filled with trees (i.e., not too big, such as dogwood or birches) that it would slow down significantly some of the runoff. Mr. Noonan marked some possible locations on the plans.

Mr. Von Plinsky said the Commission had discussed Options A, B, and C. He asked whether it was within the Commission's purview to recommend to the Planning Board (PB) that all these problems would go away if the applicant proposed one or two fewer units. Ms. Brunner said yes, the Conservation Commission can make any recommendations it wants to the PB. She noted it is most helpful for the PB when the Commission makes specific recommendations for how to improve or slightly modify the plans. She thought Mr. Von Plinsky was talking about more of a redesign and Ms. Brunner said that when the Commission has really strong concerns about an overall project, it could certainly recommend that the PB consider it. Ms. Brunner suggested that if the Commission recommended redesigning and removing a unit(s), it should also provide recommendations for the design as drawn in case the PB would not pursue the redesign. So, she said it would be like a preferred recommendation and a lesser preferred recommendation.

Mr. Bergman asked whether it would be useful to have the Community Development Department consider threshold levels of impervious surface for dense clustering of units like this; the Commission could think of proposing a marginal degree of impervious coverage to recommend not exceeding. He wondered if that would be too global to be useful in evaluating specific projects, which have a lot of variation in landscape. Ms. Brunner said what Mr. Bergman described was more like recommending and working with the Planning Board to change their Review Criteria, which is certainly within the Conservation Commission's purview. However, because it would be creating new rules, she said they could not be applied to a project already underway; the Commission could approach the Planning Board to see if there is any interest in working together to develop something for future uses, such as when the Surface Water Protection Ordinance was created.

Mr. Noonan said this application's plans had to meet current zoning standards, which include maximum building coverage and maximum impervious ground. Mr. Bergman said he did not suggest a change for this application but noted that it was a question the Commission had encountered before and might be worth considering to avoid agonizing over this in the future. Chair Madison agreed that it may be a useful conversation to consider with the Planning Board and City Council moving into 2026.

Discussion ensued briefly about possible motions on the application. Mr. Von Plinsky wanted to motion to recommend no impact on the 30-foot Surface Water Protection Buffer and Mr. Bergman wanted an additional recommendation to eliminate Unit 9 from the proposal as a possible way to minimize the need to impact the buffer. Mr. Von Plinsky did not want to step into the design aspects and only wanted to motion on the buffer impact. If the Planning Board decided to proceed with the plans drawn, Ms. Richter recommended replanting the slope and adding more street trees. Vice Chair Williams suggested two motions/recommendations, as not everyone agreed that it was worth the cost of an additional unit to preserve the buffer; he thought housing was sparse enough in the current economy, so he would vote against that part but not the rest.

The following motion by Mr. Von Plinsky was duly seconded by Mr. Bill. On a vote of 6–1, the Conservation Commission recommended adjusting the Application PB-2025-29 design to avoid any impacts to the 30-foot Surface Water Protection Buffer. Vice Chair Williams voted in opposition.

The following motion by Ms. Richter was duly seconded by Vice Chair Williams. On a vote of 7–0, for Application PB-2025-29, the Conservation Commission recommended that the southwest slope going down to (but not including) the level spreader be replanted with pollinator-friendly native shrubs or woody plants, and to include street trees wherever possible on site (not just along the Elm Street frontage).

4) <u>Report-Outs:</u>

A) Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Subcommittee

Before reporting, Mr. Haynes said he appreciated the good discussion on Application PB-2025-29 and felt like the Commission did well.

Mr. Haynes reported that the Subcommittee's meeting on Friday, December 12 was canceled because of schoolteacher's workshop day, so they would meet on December 19 instead. He provided an update for the year: nine Saturday work parties in the woods (mostly the water tower area trails), four Friday work parties doing mostly trail work (e.g., some steps and bridges on the Loop Trail), spillway bridge construction for a few weeks with at least one volunteer each day, and one youth group volunteered. On December 4, the Subcommittee met with the New England Mountain Bike Association (NEMBA) to begin the process of trying to integrate possible shared trail responsibilities. Instead of each group doing their own things, they met to see if there were

opportunities for some coordination and cooperation on the trails; more to come. Mr. Haynes said the Subcommittee's winter meetings are usually discussions about what projects the group wants to do the next spring.

Mr. Walker asked if there was a fundraising update for the spillway bridge and Mr. Haynes said not until December 19.

Mr. Haynes reported on the Subcommittee's outreach efforts in 2025: he led one walk and Mr. Bill led another geology walk. Mr. Haynes said the Subcommittee dabbles in outreach and it would be nice to do a bit more, but they had not pulled it together yet. Mr. Bill perceived one of the problems as getting the word out to potential attendees and volunteers, noting that it was a general challenge the Commission faced with the invasive species program, so it would be useful to think about and work through. Chair Madison said it seemed like the Commission was doing a pretty good job getting the word out on to volunteers on invasive species. Vice Chair Williams said not as many people showed up this season as he would have liked. He would love for the City to take the process of alerting volunteers off his hands, stating he is terrible at keeping the mailing lists. Even if not involvement, Chair Madison thought there was awareness of the invasive species program; the Vice Chair agreed. Chair Madison thought about finding ways to raise more awareness about the Goose Pond workdays as well. Mr. Haynes agreed with Vice Chair Williams that most Commissioners are not natural advertisers, they are better at other things, which is a part of the dilemma.

Mr. Haynes concluded, noting that Mr. Bill's and Mr. Walker's terms on the Commission would be ending on December 31, 2025. So, there would be open seats for Commissioners on the Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Subcommittee. Discussion about 2026 Commission membership and the Mayor's renominations waited until New Business.

B) Invasive Species

Vice Chair Williams noted there was no invasive species field work this month due to the weather. There was a City Council Workshop in November, during which he learned that the Parks and Recreation Department had started some sort of invasive species program. So, he recommended speaking with Department Director Carrah Fisk-Hennessey between now and early invasive season to learn the City's ideas for that program. Ms. Brunner recalled the Commission's discussion about spreading wildflower seeds where invasives have been removed on City properties. She had spoken with Director Fisk-Hennessey, who noted that City staff were in the middle of a three-year invasive spraying program and wanted to coordinate with the Commission to ensure the best timing. Otherwise, she was very enthusiastic about the idea.

Vice Chair Williams recalled the outstanding issue of the property owner concerned about knotweed growing on neighboring City property along White Brook. Ms. Brunner said the original letter was sent to the City Manager, Public Works Director, and Conservation

Commission. She believed the Public Works Director, Don Lussier, was handling it but Ms. Brunner was unsure how, so she suggested following up if there are any questions.

C) Land Conservation / Easement Monitoring

Ms. Richter had no updates on land conservation. On easement monitoring, she had been working on the three documents that the Commission discussed: two components for updating the Land Protection Criteria, and the procedure for how the Commission reviews and recommends land acquisitions to City Council. Ms. Richter would resend all of the documents to Ms. Brunner to share with the Commission. Due to remaining agenda items, Chair Madison suggested deferring the larger discussion of updating the Land Protection Criteria until January 2026.

D) Pollinator Updates

Mr. Therriault was ill and missed the November 2025 meeting. He reported that in early November, he sent a request to the Parks and Recreation Department, indicating the Conservation Commission discussed that overseeding areas where Japanese knotweed was successfully killed would be good. He quoted the reply email from Parks and Recreation Director Fisk-Hennessey (forwarded to Ms. Brunner and shared with the Chair): "Thanks so much for reaching out. We have invested in knotweed removal at Ladies' Wildwood for a few years now and agree with the discussion feedback from the Conservation Commission meeting. We fully support this wildflower initiative and are thrilled that it aligns with Keene's Bee City USA partnership. Please let me know if there's anything that we can do to help further." Mr. Therriault demonstrated the wildflower mix of species that should be seeded at this time of year because a lot of wildflowers have to go through a cold moist cycle to properly germinate in the spring. He bought a couple of pounds of the mix and offered to broadcast the seed over the snow where the knotweed was completely knocked back during the upcoming weeks. Mr. Therriault purchased the seed mix from a farm in Ohio, with acres of wildflowers, from which they create mixes that are optimized for regions.

Mr. Bergman asked whether the City used chemical measures to control the knotweed and therefore, whether there would be residue in the ground that might interfere with seeding. Mr. Therriault assumed some of the seed species would probably not germinate because there is an overstory of trees, swales, and a lot of environmental factors. He added that it is a seed mix, so he would not care if only two species in the mix established successfully and the remainder did not, stating that it would still get decent ground cover. Mr. Bergman said he wondered if the potential for remaining chemicals in the soil could hinder the seeds' establishment. Mr. Therriault suspected the City sprayed chemicals the previous fall season because the stalks of knotweed were tall to get down to the roots. Ms. Brunner confirmed that the City sprayed the knotweed in Ladies' Wildwood Park.

Ms. Richter asked for an update about the plan to remove the red pine in Ladies' Wildwood Park. Vice Chair Williams said he asked this question specifically during an online meeting about the red pine scale; he was one of three or four people in attendance. He learned that Ladies' Wildwood Park was not on the market for clear cutting red pine at this time because they felt enough other tree species were mixed in, so that it was not in as bad shape as Dinsmoor Woods or Wheelock Park.

5) Discussion Items:

A) Land Protection Criteria

Criteria update deferred until 2026.

B) Outreach

Discussion ensued about Commission membership. Chair Madison, Vice Chair Williams, Mr. Bill, and Mr. Walker's terms would conclude at the end of 2025. Vice Chair Williams thought he was likely to be replaced by an incoming City Councilor. Chair Madison and Mr. Bill both offered to serve another term as Alternate members. Mr. Bergman noted the Mayor had already renominated Commissioners for 2026, changing some from Alternate to Regular members. Mr. Bergman was willing to be flexible. Ms. Brunner read the Mayor's renominations from the December 4, 2025 City Council meeting, which would shift both Mr. Bergman and Mr. Milliken from Alternate to Regular members.

Mr. Von Plinsky noted that the Commission would need to nominate a new Chair in January and encouraged everyone to think about it. He said it takes a little more time, but it is fun. Ms. Brunner noted that Vice Chair Williams' term was ending after six years on the Commission. The Vice Chair agreed, stating that it was hard for him but the person who would fill his shoes would do an excellent job. Chair Madison said this would end six years for him served as a Councilor and nine years served total. He would likely return as an Alternate, but otherwise he would be focusing more on career after five years on the City Council; he would remain on the Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee and might pursue the Planning Board after his time on the Council's Planning, Licenses and Development Committee.

Commissioners should refer anyone with experience in the environmental field, who might be interested in serving on the Commission, to Mayor Kahn or Councilor Madison. The Mayor's nominations are presented at a City Council meeting (first and third Thursdays), tabled until the next meeting, and then voted upon by the City Council.

Mr. Von Plinsky asked who the Regular Commissioners would be in 2026. At this time, Ms. Brunner reported 7 Regular members: Mr. Milliken, Mr. Bill, Mr. Bergman, Ms. Richter, Ms. Kinsella, Mr. Flaherty, and Michele Chalice (one of the new councilors).

6) Adoption of 2026 Meeting Schedule

The Commission agreed to continue meeting on its regular meeting date, the third Monday of the month; in January and February, the meetings are on the third Tuesdays because of holidays. Meetings are always in the Recreation Center, Room 22, except June, July, and August when they are in the City Hall, 2nd Floor Conference Room. The Commission agreed to revert to its old meeting time of 4:30 PM (vs. 5:00 PM) as it can help create time for daylight during site visits.

A motion by Mr. Von Plinsky to adopt the 2026 Conservation Commission meeting schedule, with the adjustment that meetings start at 4:30 PM as opposed to 5:00 PM, was duly seconded by Mr. Flaherty. The motion carried unanimously.

7) New or Other Business

None presented.

8) Adjourn – Next Meeting: *Tuesday*, January 20, 2025

There being no further business, Chair Madison adjourned the meeting at 6:24 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katryna Kibler, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner