

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, January 13, 2026

8:15 AM

Room 22,
Recreation Center

Members Present:

Paul Bocko, Chair
Kelly Cook
Leslie Casey
Dian Mathews
Suzy Krautmann
Thomas Haynes, Alternate

Staff Present:

Frank “Pepper” Anderson, Parks &
Recreation Superintendent
Brett Ouellette, Parks & Recreation
Maintenance Aide

Members Not Present:

Arthur “Bud” Winsor

1) Welcome and Call to Order – Board Member Updates

Chair Bocko called the meeting to order at 8:15 AM. Roll call was conducted. The ARPAB welcomed guests, Raynee Carlson from the Friends, Councilor Haas, Rob Hamm, and Kate from the East Keene Neighborhood group.

2) Approval of December 9, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Ms. Mathews noted corrections to the meeting minutes:

Line 125 – When plants are put in the soil for the winter, it is called “healing in,” not “healing.”
Line 126 – It should be “heeled it in.”

Ms. Krautmann made a motion to approve the December 9, 2025 meeting minutes as corrected.
Ms. Casey seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Friends of Ashuelot River Park Arboretum Report

Ms. Mathews stated that the Friends are in winter mode, doing paperwork and things they need to get accomplished. She continued that they will meet in February and are talking about working out something with Antioch to use their space next to Mascoma Bank for the Friends meetings. The East Keene group invited the Friends to a meeting, and she was impressed that 23 people showed up in a snowstorm. She was announced as the speaker, which she had not been expecting. It was very interesting. The group has so many people who have different things they are working on, such as collecting cans for the Community Kitchen, and each park had its own

thing that was being worked on. It might be something they all can work out. Ms. Mathews continued that for example, Ms. Casey and Ms. Cook brought their Master Plans and passed them around. These people want to plant; that is what gardeners do. That made her think about how it would be great to have a city guide, using the Master Plan, taking the list of plants and applying that to every park, so people are not planting things willy nilly. It might be a good start.

Ms. Casey stated that it seems to her that the Pat Russell Park folks thought Public Works staff told them that they could only plant approved street trees, and it was not clear that they understood that a park is a different thing.

Chair Bocko stated that it sounds like they made some good connections. Ms. Mathews replied that it was good to educate people. She continued that people need to know what is invasive and what is not, and what would be good to grow. It would be great if all the groups could get together on something. Councilor Haas replied yes, to have more citizen education from the City, and citizen input to the City, about all the parks. He continued that the Friends of Ashuelot River Park Arboretum is probably the largest, most powerful, and most organized of all the parks groups. He and others from the East Keene Neighborhood group are trying to jump onto the Friends' coattails. Ms. Mathews replied that using the Master Plan would be a great idea.

Mr. Hamm stated that he has a concern. He continued that the Conservation Commission has a lot of recommendations for how to deal with riparian ways. Pat Russell Park and the Ashuelot River Park have the Ashuelot River running right by them. He has not seen evidence that Parks & Recreation and the city engineers pay attention to what the Conservation Commission has to say about appropriate plantings throughout the city. He would like to see evidence of that.

Chair Bocko stated that the Board has a history of, in collaboration with the Friends, having Antioch students work on projects. He continued that he has been listening to this conversation and thinking that it sounds like a great idea, to have a guide of plantings, tying together things like the Conservation Commission recommendations, a binding up of different groups. Higher education now has challenges on many levels, including having fewer students. If different groups pool resources, it could be a work study position. The ARPAB has done that before, with a student working on something through an Antioch office, to benefit the park. The displays at the park were created by a graduate student, for example.

Councilor Hamm asked if they are moving in that direction anytime soon. Chair Bocko replied no, not right now. He continued that they always need to think of the Friends' and the ARPAB's missions, but he thinks it could be a collaboration with different groups. Councilor Haas replied that the East Keene group/Friends of Pat Russell Park is not averse to fundraising for such. Chair Bocko replied that he can talk with him more about how it has worked and what they could do. He continued that right now, it is not something the ARPAB has been talking about, as they have to follow through with more recent projects, like bird ecology.

A) Parks Staff Irrigation Discussion

Chair Bocko welcomed Brett Ouellette and Frank “Pepper” Anderson, Parks & Recreation staff. He asked if they were up to speed about the irrigation problem. Mr. Anderson asked for more information.

Ms. Mathews stated that there is a spigot in the front. She continued that the Friends would like another spigot further back in the park. She continued that they are finding that it takes too much time to undo all the hoses and connections, to get all the way into the back of the park to water the projects they have done. They have a wagon full of water jugs, which they need to fill up many, many times. They coordinated with various people so that plants were continually watered over the summer. It is a lot of work.

Ms. Casey stated that it is not enough water. She continued that she did some calculations. If they want an inch a week of water per week in a garden that is a tenth of an acre, that would be 2,700 gallons of water. With the wagon, it took her two hours to do 50 gallons for the pollinator beds. There are over two acres of planted beds. They need a different solution.

Ms. Mathews stated that they were thinking, in the bed where the Elm was taken out, maybe a spigot could be placed and hidden there. Mr. Oulette asked for more information about where exactly that is. Ms. Mathews showed him on the map. Discussion ensued about the spot.

Ms. Mathews stated that something else she just thought of is that no one is talking about the piece of property for the Monadnock Conservancy. Mr. Anderson replied that his understanding is that Andy Bohannon, Deputy City Manager, will be heading that. He continued that it will be a natural playground, but he does not have all the information. It sounds like they want a restroom there, so he and Mr. Ouellette were talking about how they do not know the grand plan yet, but they might be able to run water from there. Mr. Ouellette asked if a water spigot by the compost area would be adequate for the Friends. Ms. Mathews replied she thinks so. Mr. Ouellette replied that potentially it could come from the Conservancy’s area while it is already being dug. Then Parks & Recreation would not have to worry about the irrigation lines that are already in the ground. He does not know where all the wires are for the lights.

Mr. Ouellette continued that the other thing is, they cannot just tap into the City’s irrigation and put a spigot in, due to the way the system works. When a zone comes on, a main valve comes on, which is in the box where the spigot is in the front. That main valve charges the main line. For whatever zone is scheduled to come on, there is another zone valve that comes on. Thus, there are two valves that come on to water, say, the front of the park. When you go to the next zone, the main valve stays on, while the valve for the previous zone shuts off the next one turns on. When the system is off and nothing is running, the main line is not charged at all. You cannot just tap into the main line and put in a spigot because you will not have water unless the main valve is on. With the computer program, you cannot just turn the main valve on without having another zone on. You would have to run a single line off before that master valve, so that the line would stay charged all the time for a spigot, because if you do the single line *after* the main valve, you would not get water unless the main valve was turned on.

Ms. Mathews stated that she has always wondered how much of the beds get watered with the current direction of the sprinkler heads. Mr. Ouellette replied none. He continued that when you are coming in the park from West St., that whole left side, those sprinkler heads there and on the West St. side over by Starbucks, and the same ones over by the compost and in that back area, are not like typical sprinkler heads. They are single little lines that go in a circle, almost like an umbrella. The stream comes out, then when it comes back around it shuts off. It does 180 degrees, not a full 360 degrees.

Ms. Mathews asked if he knows how much of the beds were watered with the original system. Mr. Anderson replied zero. Ms. Mathews replied that the Friends have dug up lines in the beds, but she does not know exactly where. Mr. Ouellette replied that when he started with the City, that system was being taken out, so he is not certain, but he knows that when they put the new irrigation system in, the original design was just to get the grass, not the beds. Ms. Mathews asked if he means nothing in the arboretum was considered. Mr. Ouellette replied that everything in the main area, like those few trees there, get the water. He continued that he could set some of the lines in the main area to go the full 360 degrees, but the problem is that the zone would then need to be on twice as long.

Ms. Mathews asked if they could put an asterisk there and keep it in mind, and ask Bartlett Tree about it. She continued that some of the trees are aging out now, and if they continue to have drought, it might shorten the trees' lifespans. A lot of money is involved in those trees. She asked if there would be a way to turn a sprinkler head for just a couple of waterings if there was a bad drought. Mr. Ouellette replied that he would have to go out and manually turn it on and adjust it. He continued that it could only be done with the lines that are to the right of the main path and behind where the old gazebo was. On the map, the areas shown with solid blue squares could have sprinkler lines adjusted to 360 degrees. The other ones, on the left side, with a square box that is half blue, are not made to be shooting a big stream of water and could not be adjusted in that way. Ms. Mathews replied that hopefully, if it comes to it, the trees that need it will be on the right side.

Chair Bocko stated that the expansion of the park, that whole parking lot area, is still a couple of years away. He continued that that is a "medium-term" change that might lead to expanded water access. He asked if there are any short-term solutions.

Mr. Anderson replied that the short-term solution he sees would be the possibility of a 250-gallon square tote, set up on a couple of concrete blocks, toward the compost bin area. He continued that they were talking about maybe having one by the shed area. He asked if that would be close enough for the Friends. Ms. Casey replied that they have had problems with filling from a tank, when the pressure is so low. It takes about 10 minutes to fill a container. Mr. Anderson replied that they could install a pump in the shed and connect a hose to it. He continued that it would not be the pressure of a garden hose, but at least they could have enough pressure to fill a jug in a timely fashion. Mr. Ouellette added that it would be something like a 12-volt RV pump. You hook up the battery and hit a switch, and it pumps it out of the tank, and with a 25- or 50-foot hose, you could probably fill a five-gallon bucket in a couple minutes.

Friends members replied that they have concerns about vandalism and/or people trying to drink the water. Mr. Ouellette replied that it could be elevated and have plywood up the sides to deter people from trying to tamper with it, or they could box it underneath. Friends members asked where the water in the tank would come from. Mr. Anderson replied that they could try and capture some rainwater, but mostly, Parks staff would fill it up with the hose. Mr. Ouellette replied that Parks staff are there for trash runs on Mondays and Fridays and could maybe check/fill it then, with a garden hose connected to the spigot out front, or maybe a Friends' member or volunteer could be tasked with it once a week or so. Friends replied yes, they think they could do that. Ms. Mathews and others stated that it sounds like a workable idea. Mr. Ouellette stated that he does not know how much water the Friends would use in a week, and how frequently the tank would need to be filled.

Chair Bocko and the ARPAB thanked Mr. Anderson and Mr. Ouellette. Chair Bocko stated that he and Ms. Mathews can follow up with Ms. Fisk-Hennessey after the meeting. He continued that there is plenty of time, considering there is no watering happening in the gardens right now.

4) Finance

A) Calendar Year Budget (Trustees)

Chair Bocko stated that he and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey talked last week about the ARPAB discussing the budget today, but he thinks the pressure on that was lessened and they will do it another time, since Ms. Fisk-Hennessey is not here today. Looking at the finance report, the ARPAB has not spent all of what was proposed, so they will have funds to carry forward. However, he does not know if they will have all of these carryover funds plus the yearly allotment; he thinks the total needs to be within a certain window.

Ms. Casey stated that the City mulch plus the City herbicide treatment really takes a chunk away. Ms. Mathews asked about the leaves this past year. Mr. Anderson replied that staff took the leaves out of the beds, then they sent them through the Parks Department's machine that breaks them up into small pieces, and then staff blew them back into the beds. Ms. Mathews replied that she is so happy to hear that. She asked Mr. Anderson to thank the people who did that. Other Friends agreed. Mr. Anderson stated that they also started collecting leaves from the cemeteries, bringing them back to their shop, and putting them in a pile for themselves so this compost is not contaminated in the future. The ARPAB and Friends thanked him.

Chair Bocko asked if anyone else had anything to say about the budget. He continued that they had talked last time about people jotting down ideas about the budget. They have a little more time. Ms. Krautmann asked if Ms. Fisk-Hennessey goes before the Trustees in March. Chair Bocko replied that he cannot remember. Ms. Mathews stated that Bartlett had a big year last year. She continued that her question is whether it will be that amount of work every year, or whether it will be like that again. She continued that she is not sure if Mr. Winsor has talked with the new Bartlett person. Chair Bocko replied that it is something to follow up on. He continued that something to keep in mind is that the ARPAB whittled down Bartlett's original proposal, too. Ms. Carlson replied that she was going to say, the difference between what has actually been paid out versus what was proposed is significant. Chair Bocko replied that he and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey have been talking about is that it might be that Bartlett was thinking about the

work in terms of the seasons, whereas the ARPAB needs to budget based on the calendar year. That is something to keep in mind.

Ms. Carlson asked about the invasives treatment. She continued that the Friends have been paying their share of the cost for spraying the invasives. Chair Bocko replied that he thinks the Public Works budget paid for it this time. Mr. Anderson replied that the area was sprayed at the same time Public Works had all of their spraying done. He had asked for it to be sprayed because of all the knotweed. Chair Bocko replied that they will follow up on this, especially as they renew the budget.

5) Project Tracking

A) Permanent Sign Development

Chair Bocko stated that he had a note from Ms. Fisk-Hennessey about sign development. He continued that the project has legs. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey's note was thinking about outsourcing creating the sign, which he thinks they had always planned on doing, with Peter Poanessa. He thinks Ms. Fisk-Hennessey is still catching up with where the ARPAB was at with this project, because the ARPAB has languished with this project for a while. Discussion ensued about whether the idea is to outsource the design as well as the actual creation of the sign, with ARPAB members noting that Mr. Poanessa requires a finished design and does not participate in the design process. Chair Bocko stated that as they do budget development, they need to think about whether they need a third party to do this sign design. Discussion ensued about finding out who in the community could do this. Chair Bocko replied that he is sure they could find someone. He continued that it is a matter of how much it would cost. He could talk with Ms. Fisk-Hennessey about sourcing someone. Even though it sounds like in house, the capacity is not there for getting the design to Peter-Poanessa-quality, they still need a basic mock-up to give to someone who would do the design.

Ms. Mathews replied that she had written "send layouts to Ms. Fisk-Hennessey" and she was talking about it with Ms. Carlson and she just now realized what that note to herself means. She will get those sign layout ideas to Ms. Fisk-Hennessey. Chair Bocko replied that Ms. Fisk-Hennessey had not known about those. Ms. Mathews replied that maybe they should have a committee meeting, find a layout that might work, then find a graphic designer.

Ms. Carlson asked if Parks staff would be moving the sign, and when. Mr. Anderson replied that it is not on their schedule anytime soon. He continued that after spring it would probably be the earliest time they could do it. First things first, they need to get the irrigation up and get the ball fields up. So it would be after June 10, approximately. Chair Bocko replied that the way the front and back of that sign turn out might determine how the ARPAB wants it to be placed. Ms. Mathews stated that they want to move it about four feet forward, so people can see both sides of it. Discussion continued.

6) Recent/Upcoming Events

Chair Bocko noted they have flyers for the “The Nature of Oaks” event, tonight at 6:00 PM. Councilor Hamm replied that there will also be one in February and one in March. He continued that they are partnering with the Caterpillar Lab. Everyone is invited.

7) New/Other Business

Ms. Casey stated that she sent Ms. Fisk-Hennessey and Mr. Winsor an email about the snow piling up in the handicapped parking spots at the park. Discussion ensued. Chair Bocko stated that they can keep an eye on this as the winter continues. Ms. Casey stated that they cannot put in valuable plants unless they can be sure they will not get covered in snow and salt.

Ms. Mathews asked if anyone has heard anything about the dam. She continued that the charette she attended by the RI School of Design was five years ago. She was curious about whether anything has occurred. There were five proposed designs. The fish ladders were beautiful but expensive. Most people said they liked the dam the way it was, but whether that was doable was in question. Mr. Haynes stated that he is not sure, but he thinks that not much will happen unless the State puts pressure on the City. He continued that he believes there is money for dam removal, but not necessarily money for an alternative. His sense is there is not a lot of pressure being put on anyone, but he does not know anything for sure. Mr. Anderson replied that he has not heard anything new lately. Discussion continued about the ideas for the dam/river.

Chair Bocko asked if there was any other new or other business.

Councilor Haas stated that he and others from East Keene will be continuing their discussions about a broader view of managing the parks and horticulture, at the next Conservation Commission meeting. He continued that the discussion will be along the same themes, about getting a united group going, and information sharing.

8) Adjourn – Next Meeting Scheduled for Tuesday, February 10, 2026

There being no further business, Chair Bocko adjourned the meeting at 9:07 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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