

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, January 20, 2026

4:30 PM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Gary Flaherty, Chair
Barbara Richter, Vice Chair
William White
Councilor Michele Chalice
Steven Bill (Remote)
Ken Bergman
Bob Milliken, Alternate (Voting)
Thomas Haynes, Alternate
John Therriault, Alternate
Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Alternate

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner / Acting Zoning
Administrator

Members Not Present:

Katie Kinsella

1) Call to Order

Ms. Brunner called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM and called roll. Mr. Bill participated remotely from NY due to travel and there was no one in the room with him.

2) Election of Chair and Vice Chair

A motion by Mr. Bergman to nominate Mr. Flaherty and Ms. Richter as the 2026 Conservation Commission Chair and Vice Chair, respectively, was duly seconded by Councilor Chalice. The motion carried unanimously on a roll call vote.

3) Approval of Meeting Minutes – December 15, 2025

Revisions: Line 144, change the word “she” to “he.” Lines 177–178, change the metrics to feet instead of meters. Lines 351–361, the scrivener’s formatting error and missing text will be corrected to the version shared with the Commission. Line 428, change “getting the word out to volunteers” to “getting the word out to potential attendees and volunteers.”

A motion by Mr. White to adopt the December 15, 2025 meeting minutes, as amended, was duly seconded by Mr. Bergman. The motion carried unanimously on a roll call vote.

4) **Introductions for New Members**

Commissioners introduced themselves:

- *Bill White* is a 2014 Keene State College (KSC) graduate. He moved back to Keene with his wife and son two years before joining the Commission, after living 10 years in Brooklyn, New York. Mr. White is a union Firefighter/EMT for both Amherst and Bedford, New Hampshire. He said he was excited to hit the ground running and help out where he could on the Commission.
- *Michelle Chalice* is a newly elected City Councilor. She is a former Keene City Planner (retired seven years ago). She was also formerly a licensed landscape architect in the Midwest with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Now, Councilor Chalice said she has a small consulting company, Healthy Home Habitats, where she aspires and designs wildlife habitats, edible landscapes, and the more efficient uses of home resources for residential settings.
- *Ken Bergman* is a retired KSC Biology Professor. He has been a member of this Commission for quite a few years. Now, he does a lot of wildlife photography.
- *Vice Chair Barbara Richter* was on the Conservation Commission many years ago and cycled off for a while. She is also Executive Director of the New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions (NHACC), which is a statewide organization that provides support and training to NH conservation commissions. Commissioners can reach out to her with any questions, and she shared the [NHACC's Member Resource Library](#), which is a good place for new Conservation Commissioners to learn about everything from conservation funding to conservation planning, and general operations of a Conservation Commission. Commissioners can also sign-up for the NHACC's monthly E-newsletters; Vice Chair Richter would send the sign-up link to Ms. Brunner, who would forward it to the Commission.
- *Sparky Von Plinsky IV* is former Commission Chair, now an Alternate Member. He recently became a stay-at-home dad, working remotely.
- *Bob Milliken* recently retired from his position as Director of Technology for SAU29. Now, he said he would be getting back to his roots. He formerly worked for Walden Department of Environmental Management in Massachusetts. At this time, he was also serving on the Conservation Commission for the Hogback Mountain Conservation Area in Marlboro, Vermont.
- *John Therriault* had been living in Keene for 15 years at this time and he is retired now. He asked the City to become a Bee City USA affiliate and became an Alternate Member of the Conservation Commission mainly to ensure the Bee City ethos would make its way into the fabric of this City. Mr. Therriault is also President of the Monadnock Beekeepers Association and Vice President of the New Hampshire Beekeepers Association. He had also been influential in ensuring that whenever a City applicant needs to reseed something, they do so with a recommended Northeast Pollinator Mix, which is about 18 different seeds that are native wildflowers to New England.
- *Tom Haynes* is Chair of the Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Subcommittee. He was formerly the Chair of the Conservation Commission and has been serving as a member for a long time.

- *Chair Gary Flaherty* is a part-time private consultant. He has 50 years' experience as a Certified Wetlands Soil Scientist, Wetlands Scientist, and working in hazardous waste on Superfund sites.
- *Steve Bill* is a retired KSC Geology Professor. He had been a Commissioner for a while and said he was still learning.

5) Report-Outs:

A) Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Subcommittee

Mr. Haynes said that the Subcommittee met on Friday, January 16, 2026. Normally, the winter meetings are for talking and planning, so the Subcommittee created a list of trails that could potentially use work during the upcoming summer season.

Mr. Haynes reported that unbeknown to the Subcommittee, The Harris Center for Conservation Education scheduled some programs in the Goose Pond Forest. He said the Subcommittee was trying to work with The Harris Center to determine a possible partnership and to try more outreach, something for which the Subcommittee does not have capacity. Mr. Haynes said they might ask someone from The Harris Center to attend the Subcommittee meetings for that outreach.

Next, Mr. Hayes shared updates on the spillway bridge, which was built, but the ramp on the north side was still incomplete. He said the Subcommittee talked about doing that as its bigger project next summer (2026), so there would be more accessibility and use for bikers.

Mr. Haynes said the Subcommittee was slowly thinking about blazing a few of the trails that pedestrians use and might be helpful. The Subcommittee also continued discussing an "All Persons Trail" at the South Trailhead but decided it would be a project for 2027. Mr. Haynes reported that the Subcommittee made some deeper connections with the New England Mountain Bike Association (NEMBA) and hoped to possibly partner with them on some of the trail work; NEMBA has a young crew that could be helpful to the Subcommittee.

Lastly, Mr. Haynes mentioned recruitment. The Subcommittee needed a new member because Art Walker's term on the Commission ended. So, there was an opening for one more Commissioner to serve on the Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Subcommittee (without violating quorum; three members allowed). Mr. Haynes invited anyone interested to contact him.

B) Invasive Plant Species

Mr. Milliken spoke about an interesting meeting he attended at the Parks and Recreation Center (Invasive Species Lunch and Learn on January 15) organized by Parks and Recreation Director, Carrah Fisk-Hennessey. A diverse group of people from the City discussed the future of invasive species management in the City of Keene. Councilor Chalice also attended and agreed that it was a great meeting because it included City staff, City contractors, and Conservation Commissioners. Vice Chair Richter added that there were also City Councilors and volunteers in attendance, so she thought it was a great meeting to bring everybody together, get people started

on the same page, and help everybody to better understand Keene's approach to controlling invasive species.

Vice Chair Richter thought the speaker (Andy Powers from Vegetative Control Services, a contractor and certified herbicide applicator) did really well outlining what they do for Keene, their focus on how they deal with different species, and how many times they have to come back (five treatments to really eradicate an invasive plant). They talked about the different control methods, both chemical and manual control methods, the latter of which are a lot of what Bobby Williams was doing with his volunteer group (i.e., literally pulling out the invasive plant). The Vice Chair said it was good to see both control measures used in Keene more holistically. Previously, she thought the City and volunteers were leading two separate efforts and did not know how they overlapped, so Vice Chair Richter appreciated the meeting. She planned on sending a note to Director Fisk-Hennessey about how well it went overall.

Mr. Milliken said the outcome of the meeting was the fact that all stakeholders would come together and try to educate the public about what invasive species are, and to hopefully help people manage them on their own properties. He agreed that it was a good opportunity.

Councilor Chalice was thrilled to see so many parties at the table, including the Public Works Department, because they are on the ground in the City. The Public Works staff were invited to send a list of invasive species sites they come across to the Parks and Recreation Department, so they could potentially be added to the contractor's contract, which Councilor Chalice never heard of before. She was thrilled by this meeting, which she and Vice Chair Richter each thought was the first of its kind. Councilor Chalice noted how many resource sheets were shared amongst the diverse stakeholders, calling it a great way to even-out knowledge between the various parties. She added materials from the meeting, listing the various control methods, to the Commission's shared Google Drive (public viewable link on the agenda; accessible to the Commission with a Gmail address). Councilor Chalice found it hopeful to move forward with a bit more clarity.

Mr. Haynes recalled the Commission suggesting an invasive species contact person at the City of Keene. He wondered if that came up at the meeting. Mr. Milliken said he mentioned it. Councilor Chalice said at this time, the City of Keene contacts for invasive species were City Engineer Bryan Ruoff and Parks and Recreation Director, Carrah Fisk-Hennessey; it sounded like they were both handling the contract. However, there still was not a designated invasive species management person, such as the Commission had recommended. Councilor Chalice agreed that it would be fabulous.

Councilor Chalice mentioned the new [Landing Page for Volunteer Opportunities](#), which Deputy City Manager Rebecca Landry soft launched on the City of Keene website. Invasive species volunteering could potentially be added to this as an option. Councilor Chalice mentioned that nobody was designated to take over Bobby Williams' role leading the Commission's Invasive Species Program, but she was talking with one of the volunteers and might be able to work it out.

Mr. Bergman imagined the implicit focus of the City's invasive species management efforts would be closer to the core of the City, rather than dispersed out in the remote areas of the rail bed, etc. He thought about the practicality of deploying City resources and a limited budget.

Councilor Chalice said the Rail Trails were not mentioned, but she was not sure that it was all spelled out during the meeting. Ms. Brunner offered to follow up with Ms. Fisk-Hennessey and Mr. Ruoff. Ms. Brunner said the City's resources are limited. She thought that there would be a combination of efforts in the different areas Mr. Bergman mentioned by various volunteer groups (e.g., Friends of the Ashuelot River Park Arboretum). Mr. Milliken mentioned that the Hogback Mountain Conservation Area maps out where everything is, which is something the City could consider. Councilor Chalice agreed that it would be great.

C) Land Conservation / Easement Monitoring

Vice Chair Richter said that with the winter weather, she would likely still not get out to the easements until spring.

She had been working on a Conservation Priority Checklist and the Land Protection Criteria. The Vice Chair noticed the Commission had a few discussions about buying land and there was no real outline to guide the Commission's decision-making process. She observed that in most conversations, the higher priority was having land that abuts existing conservation land. Not wanting to reinvent the wheel, she looked through the 2018 City of Keene Conservation Commission Land Protection Criteria. She did not think it would be necessary to change a lot, but it would be helpful to add some more language about abutting conservation land. She also had questions for the other Commissioners about whether some of the other Criteria were still really being used or filling a priority. Vice Chair Richter also welcomed questions and ideas based on the packet of information she shared (available in [the Commissions 01/20/26 Agenda Packet](#)). She hoped to discuss whether the Commission wanted to move forward with Checklist and how to update the Land Protection Criteria. Discussion ensued.

Mr. Therriault hoped to see some verbiage showing the Commission's interest in supporting pollinator habitat/corridors, noting that wildlife corridors and pollinator corridors are not necessarily the same things. He said more meadows and fewer trees, or vice versa, depending on wildlife or pollinators.

Mr. Bergman asked about the intent of the last two pages of the Land Protection Criteria that Vice Chair Richter presented, which were from the 2018 document: were they intended to serve as background for the previous pages, to supplement/reinforce each other, or to be subsumed within a new document like this one. Vice Chair Richter said they complement each other: the checklist would be based on the Criteria (she would confirm that was reflected, with the Checklist headings matching the Criteria).

Mr. Bergman mentioned the DRAFT 2026 *City of Keene Conservation Commission Guideline for Acquiring Legal Interest in Conservation Land*, which included a final line, "Any of the provisions listed in paragraph 6A may be waived by the City Council, at its discretion, based upon factors identified in the project package." Vice Chair Richter thought that template language carried over and could be discussed at a later date once the priorities were set. She said this document is a good way for all parties to understand how acquiring land works in the City and everyone's role: the Conservation Commission, City staff, and City Council. She thought there was an opportunity to outline these roles in the process more clearly. Vice Chair Richter

thought this document could be simplified more because it was probably written by an attorney from a template and it did not need that level of detail for the Commission's purposes. Mr. Bergman agreed that the reference to "paragraph 6A" did not refer to anything contained within the pages.

Chair Flaherty referred to the *City of Keene Conservation Commission Land Protection Criteria* (Adopted April 2018; Updated December 2025), Criteria 2.c. Urban forests. It was incomplete with question marks. He wanted to clarify what Vice Chair Richter's question was. She said she wondered whether some of the places she highlighted and urban forests were still up for discussion. Councilor Chalice said yes. Vice Chair Richter cited land suitable for urban agriculture or community gardens and asked if the Commission was still interested. Chair Flaherty said urban forests are just trees along the street and in people's yards and Vice Chair Richter said at the moment, that is correct. Discussion continued briefly on the definition of urban forests, emphasizing urban.

Mr. Bergman recalled Mr. Von Plinsky previously questioning whether Keene could acquire or create a City forest; the idea was for the land between Routes 9 and 10. Mr. Von Plinsky agreed. Mr. Bergman said it may not be quite the same as an urban forest. He was unsure whether that could inform this Land Protection language. Mr. Von Plinsky thought this was something for which it might be helpful to form a subcommittee to workshop ideas about the definition of an urban forest, which could mean something different to each person. Chair Flaherty disagreed, stating that the definition he shared was the general definition; he did not make it up. Councilor Chalice thought the Commission might want to expand upon it. Mr. Von Plinsky and Chair Flaherty agreed that a Subcommittee could be a great way to work this out and bring something back to the Commission that has been processed more.

Mr. White noticed that he was hearing two versions of an urban forest in the Commission's discussion. He heard Chair Flaherty cite an accepted definition, which is more like trees lining Main Street or streets, and Mr. Von Plinsky's concept, which is more like a Central Park where an expansive forest surrounds and is within the compact City unit. Mr. Von Plinsky agreed. Discussion continued about why a Subcommittee could help clarify the Commission's consensus about what it means by and hopes for the City's urban forest. Mr. Bill noted that forests near Keene Dillant-Hopkins Airport do not fall into either of those categories. When thinking about definitions, he suggested they should probably be broad enough to include things like those.

Discussion ensued about how the Commission would provide Vice Chair Richter with feedback on the 2026 Draft Land Protection Criteria and proposed Keene Conservation Priorities Checklist. Options included: sending written comments individually through City staff, forming a Subcommittee with no more than three Commissioners (due to quorum) and meetings that still require public notice, or a workshop with a quorum (at least 5 members) of the Commission before/after a regular Commission meeting or on alternating Mondays (also publicly noticed and staffed by a Minute Taker). The Commission agreed that direct and free communication would be more efficient and productive than via email.

The Commission and City staff agreed that holding a special, public Conservation Commission Workshop one hour before its regular February 2026 meeting would be the best path forward.

Remote participation would still be available. Any other comments on the draft documents should be sent directly to Ms. Brunner, who will send them to the appropriate parties; Commissioners cannot email the group directly because it triggers quorum. Vice Chair Richter would coordinate with Ms. Brunner to schedule the *Tuesday*, February 17, 2026 Workshop at 3:30 PM.

In the meantime, Vice Chair Richter said she would work to make the Draft Land Protection Criteria and proposed Keene Conservation Priorities Checklist reflect each other better. She asked Commissioners to send values that particularly interest them (e.g., pollinators, trees, and wildlife) to Ms. Brunner, so Vice Chair Richter could see what rises to the surface. She hoped for some brainstorming ahead of the Workshop.

Mr. Milliken wondered if the Commission could feed information into a live Google Document. Ms. Brunner said no. Mr. Milliken asked about a Google Form that only sends information to Ms. Brunner. Ms. Brunner said that it could work; it would be like a survey, and she could put the results in the meeting packets, so they are public.

D) Pollinator Updates

Mr. Therriault reported spreading about two pounds of the Northeast Pollinator Mix at Ladies Wildwood Park in the two watersheds between Park Avenue and Arch Street, one of which flows toward Arch Street and the other away from it. He spread roughly one pound in each watershed. He said he uses the old, shriveled stalks of Japanese knotweed as his blueprint for to where to spread the seeds. Mr. Therriault thought the Commission would be amazed at what wildflowers would grow in April, May, and June 2026. Councilor Chalice called it great news, noting that some of the distributed seeds may not come up this year but could have the ability to grow the next year, when the conditions are right. Mr. Therriault agreed, noting that he used this Northeast Pollinator Mix around his house about four/five years prior and the California poppies and red poppies grew a lot in one area during the first year but never reseeded; they never grew in another area. However, a few other species reseeded year after year. He said it really depends on the exposure, soil conditions (e.g., pH), and all the other things that help/hinder seeds' thriving.

Next, Mr. Therriault recalled that Bee City USA is through the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, which had changed its reporting structure. He said the period to submit Annual Reports (for 2025) was supposed to open on the first Monday in February and close at the end of February. However, that message did not get out to everyone, so they extended the deadline until the end of March 2026, by which time Mr. Therriault would submit the City's 2025 Annual Report, as required. He noted that this would likely be his last year on the Commission and wanted someone to sit with him while writing the 2025 Report to ensure continuity next year. Councilor Chalice and Ms. Brunner volunteered.

6) Correspondence:

A) Society for the Protection of NH Forests – Annual Easement Monitoring Report

Ms. Brunner shared correspondence from the Society for the Protection of NH Forests in the Meeting Packet that was also copied to the City Attorney, Amanda Palmeira. The letter highlighted that there was some tree clearing, and to Ms. Brunner's understanding, it was all related to the red pine scale. She reported that the City would be corresponding back to the Society for the Protection of NH Forests about the situation. She said there would be a lot more tree cutting, especially of the infected timber along the Dinsmoor Woods that was noticed on the aerial easement monitoring. Chair Flaherty asked Ms. Brunner to clarify the Tax Map Parcel (TMP) numbers.

Mr. Bill said Goose Pond was not listed and asked if that was deliberate or an oversight; the Society for the Protection of NH Forests has signs at Goose Pond. Mr. Haynes wondered if this was a part of their overall survey. Vice Chair Richter thought that the TMPs would not say "Goose Pond," they would say "City of Keene." She thought what was listed as "City of Keene" was likely Goose Pond. Discussion also ensued briefly about the Horatio Colony Nature Preserve. Ms. Brunner wanted to get the TMPs, otherwise the Commission would continue speculating. She thought the Dinsmoor Woods are not actually a park but conservation land that borders Maple Avenue.

Councilor Chalice requested a map as well, showing where all these places are. Mr. Bergman noted that in NH GRANIT, the public conservation lands layer was not giving the names and asked if there was a way to evoke the names for the tracts. Vice Chair Richter advised: right click, hold, and there will be a box that says "City of Keene" as the owner and whether it is a conservation easement or fee owned. Mr. Bergman said it does not identify the particular name of the tract or parcel number, such as the way the City's Tax Parcel Map does when hovering with a cursor. Vice Chair Richter said GRANIT is just an info box like a tax map, but it identifies the City of Keene for most things, so it is challenging to know whether the land is used for other purposes. She did note that if indicated in green, the parcels would be in conservation.

B) Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee – Annual Report

Ms. Brunner recalled that the Commission had donated annually to the Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee (ARLAC) for its annual water testing. So, each year, ARLAC sends the Commission its Annual Report. Two former Conservation Commission Chairs, Eloise Clark and Andrew Madison, were/are ARLAC members. So, Ms. Brunner thought the Commission had lost some of its connection with ARLAC, but they are active in the community.

7) New or Other Business

A) Member Bios

Ms. Brunner noted the intention to potentially post Commission member bios on the City of Keene Conservation Commission webpage.

Discussion ensued on other New Business. Mr. Bergman mentioned the Planning Board (PB) Referral from the December 15, 2025 Conservation Commission meeting for a Cottage Court Conditional Use Permit (CUP) at 454 Elm Street. Mr. Bergman discussed the Planning Board's subsequent decision to approve Application PB-2025-29 on December 22, 2025. He said the contingencies listed in an Action Report about the approval did not include reference to the Commission's concerns, but he had not seen the Planning Board minutes yet. He asked Ms. Brunner to clarify whether or not the Planning Board (PB) heard the Commission's concerns. Ms. Brunner was not at the December 22, 2025 PB meeting but said [the video recording is on the City's YouTube to view](#). After five business days, you can request to view draft minutes from the City Clerk's office before they are adopted. Ms. Brunner stated her understanding that the PB did incorporate the recommendations from one of the Conservation Commission's motions but did not take the recommendation to reduce the number of units.

Mr. Bergman recalled the Commission recommending that the applicant should do whatever they could to avoid impinging on the buffer and he did not see that mentioned in the action. Ms. Brunner agreed that the Commission made two motions at its December 15, 2025 meeting. One was to avoid the buffer entirely, which the PB did not accept. Recommendations from the Conservation Commission's second motion were actually already incorporated into the plans before the PB meeting: the applicant added the trees, plantings, and pollinator mix. So, the approved the plan incorporated those recommendations. Mr. Bergman did not see the Commission's explicit concern about the buffer itself in the Action/Contingencies and wondered if the PB did not take formal action on it at all, and if the PB's final minutes would show whether they gave some consideration to advice from the Conservation Commission. Ms. Brunner recalled that the full meeting recording is available. She also believed the full draft of the Conservation Commission minutes was made available to the PB at the time of its meeting and Ms. Brunner sent a memo that that was included in their agenda packet. They receive a lot of information in their meeting packets, so she advised that when there is a matter the Commission or a specific Commissioner is really concerned about the PB taking seriously, it is always much more impactful and effective to show up at the meeting and speak about it. She suggested that the Commission could always empower the Chair or Vice Chair speak on its behalf. Staff liaisons also give updates, but Ms. Brunner was not at that meeting, although she briefed the staff who attended on the Conservation Commission's recommendations, and she hoped the PB minutes would reflect that. Mr. Bergman said he would find it disheartening if the PB was not at least statutorily obliged to acknowledge and comment in response to the Conservation Commission's recommendations. He believes the PB must at least listen, statutorily, and it would be good to know that it is happening.

With the consideration of Cottage Court CUPs being the PB's role, Councilor Chalice said that although not a PB member, she could be aware of their meetings and attend if it would be helpful. She thought that as a City Councilor, she could carry forward and add to the Conservation Commission's requests and messages. Ms. Brunner agreed it is always more impactful to deliver the message in-person and City staff will always try to deliver a message on the Commission's behalf. She said whether the PB explicitly addresses that in their deliberation or not depends on the Planning Board members and whether they think to discuss it. When attending PB meetings, Councilor Chalice would be a member of the public representing the Conservation Commission. Vice Chair Richter added that when voting on PB referrals, the

Commission could go a step further and motion to send a specific Commissioner to speak about the recommendations. Councilor Chalice liked that suggestion because if she has a conflict on a specific date, they could vote to send someone in her place.

Mr. Bergman recalled the Commission discussing the possibility of a joint meeting or consulting with the Planning Board to discuss whether there should be more explicit guidelines or thresholds for percent permeable surface area. He thought that it was still something advisable to follow through on.

Councilor Chalice asked the best way for her to learn about the City's red pine scale removal strategy. Ms. Brunner noted that this Commission heard presentations in the past from Deputy City Manager Andy Bohannon and Parks and Recreation Director, Carrah Fisk-Hennessey. There were also two presentations before the Municipal Services, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee that should be recorded and available to view. Ms. Brunner suggested that the Councilor should contact Ms. Fisk-Hennessey for more information and access to presentations from the prior year. There had also been a community event on Zoom that was open to anyone interested in learning more, but Ms. Brunner did not know if that was recorded. Ms. Brunner said the Commission could also request an update from Ms. Fisk-Hennessey, if members were interested. Councilor Chalice said she was interested.

8) Adjournment - Next Meeting: TUESDAY, February 17, 2026

There being no further business, Chair Flaherty adjourned the meeting at 5:36 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katryna Kibler, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner