



CONSERVATION COMMISSION
WORKSHOP AGENDA

Tuesday, February 17, 2026

3:30 PM

**City Hall, Second Floor
Conference Room**

Commission Members

Katie Kinsella
William White
Michele Chalice
Barbara Richter
Steven Bill
Gary Flaherty

Kenneth Bergman
Bob Milliken, Alternate
Thomas P. Haynes, Alternate
John Therriault, Alternate
Alexander Von Plinsky, Alternate

1. Call to Order

2. Workshop:

- **Conservation Land Protection Criteria** – The Keene Conservation Commission will hold a workshop to discuss priorities for acquiring conservation land, guidelines for acquiring legal interest in conservation land, and potential updates to the Commission's adopted Land Protection Criteria.

3. Adjourn

CITY OF KEENE CONSERVATION COMMISSION LAND PROTECTION CRITERIA

ADOPTED APRIL 2018

Land that supports or enhances the following resources/features should be a priority for the City of Keene Conservation Commission as it makes recommendations to the City Council on land protection and conservation.

1. Water Resources
 - a. Frontage on rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and reservoirs
 - b. Land overlying aquifers and aquifer recharge areas
 - c. Wetlands, vernal pools, floodplains, buffer areas, and riparian zones
2. Forest Resources
 - a. Tracts of woodland with sufficient size, appropriate soils, and other attributes that support responsible forest management, including the production of timber and other forest products.
 - b. Steep slopes (slopes with grades greater than 15%)
 - c. Urban forests
 - d. Large un-fragmented blocks of forests
3. Agricultural Resources
 - a. Farmlands and open fields with prime soils and other attributes that support agriculture or have the potential to support agriculture.
 - b. Land well suitable for agriculture that do not have prime soils
 - c. Urban agriculture
4. Wildlife and Natural Areas
 - a. Large tracts of undeveloped habitat and corridors important for wildlife
 - b. Land containing ecologically significant or rare natural communities or species
 - c. Priority land as identified in the New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan, Natural Resource Inventories, or existing Land Management Plans
 - d. Other lands which increase the diversity and viability of wildlife populations, including fields, riparian areas, land contiguous to existing protected natural areas, and land that can serve as a buffer to developed areas
5. Cultural, Recreational, and Scenic Value
 - a. Land that offers opportunities for appropriate outdoor recreation by the public
 - b. Scenic views, ridgelines, and other aesthetic areas
 - c. Landscapes that preserve the region's cultural and historic heritage
 - d. Land that promotes connectivity of recreational networks
6. Collaboration and Leverage
 - a. Land where there are multiple entities (e.g. surrounding towns or local organizations) willing to collaborate on protection/conservation efforts
 - b. Land that is vulnerable to development pressure
 - c. Land where there are landowners willing to support conservation and protection

Keene Conservation Priorities Checklist

Parcel Tax Map and Lot # _____

Parcel size: _____

Property description: _____

Owner Name: _____ Contact Information: _____

Financial Considerations:

- ☐ Parcel or Conservation Easement (CE) to be donated by owner
- ☐ Significant bargain sale
- ☐ Owner needs full appraised value
- ☐ Project is eligible for external funding, such as grants (PREP, Mooseplate, LCHIP, etc.)

Other considerations:

- ☐ Landowners are willing/interested in supporting conservation and protection of property
- ☐ Project is consistent with Master Plan and/or Natural Resource Inventory (NRI) Goals
- ☐ Survey available and/or no outstanding family issues/other barriers
- ☐ Project is a collaboration with other organizations/towns
- ☐ Land is vulnerable to development pressure

Are there any criteria that weigh against the project?

- ☐ The presence of contamination from hazardous materials.
- ☐ The project presents substantial challenges for perpetual stewardship and monitoring.
- ☐ The project has or could have significant community opposition.
- ☐ Protection could be provided in another way or by another organization more effectively.
- ☐ City staff and commission lack the capacity to take on the project.
- ☐ City staff and commission lack the funding resources for this project.
- ☐ Existing or proposed land use or development of abutting properties would be incompatible with the conservation values of the proposed protected property.
- ☐ Questionable title, extensive family issues, unclear property boundaries or encroachment issues

How to use the checklist: Use this checklist to identify the HIGHEST priority resources and gather a comprehensive set of data on that resource. The scores should be used to identify/highlight key features/natural resource values associated with the property being evaluated. This will help to determine the parcel's priority for potential funding/acquisition.

Keene Conservation Priorities Checklist

	Potential benefit	Details and Resources	Scoring (Yes/Some/No)	Y/S/N
1.	Contiguous to existing Conservation Land (conservation easement or fee-owned)	Refer to Conservation and Open Space with Conservation Layer added. Use NH GRANIT view – Environment & Conservation – Conservation and Public lands for current updated data.	<input type="checkbox"/> Directly abuts existing Conservation Land <input type="checkbox"/> In close proximity to existing Conservation Land <input type="checkbox"/> Creates connections to existing Conservation <input type="checkbox"/> Does not abut existing Conservation Land	
3.	Priority Agricultural Resources	Refer to GRANIT View Check Geological and Geophysical layer and then select Farmland Soils	<input type="checkbox"/> Includes a Prime Agricultural Resource (PAR) <input type="checkbox"/> Adjacent to a Prime Ag <input type="checkbox"/> Has Statewide or local import soils <input type="checkbox"/> Meets none of the above	
4.	Drinking Water Protection (groundwater)	Refer to GRANIT View Check Inland Water Resources, select Aquifer Transmissivity Also Check Southwest Regional Planning Commission Water Resources	<input type="checkbox"/> Overlays primary water supply protection area and/or stratified drift aquifer <input type="checkbox"/> Overlays secondary water supply protection area and/or is adjacent to stratified drift aquifer <input type="checkbox"/> Meets none of the above	
5.	Surface Water Quality	Refer to GRANIT View Select Inland Water Resources and then check Surface Water to see resource	<input type="checkbox"/> Project contains or fronts on the Ashuelot river, or is located within 300 feet of a river/ pond; <input type="checkbox"/> Surface water and/or wetland present <input type="checkbox"/> Project does not afford protection to surface water supplies	
6.	Wildlife Habitat Quality High quality wildlife habitat and may also contain endangered, threatened, or rare species or natural communities.	Use GRANIT View to access NH Fish & Game’s Wildlife Action Plan Maps (WAP) to view the highest ranked habitats map. Go to Environment and Conservation – Wildlife Action Plan. Look to see if pink (state), green (region) or gold (supporting landscape) is present in the project area.	<input type="checkbox"/> Highest Ranked Habitat in the State (Tier 1 – Pink) or Highest Ranked Habitat in the Region (Tier 2 – Green) in project area; <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting landscape (Gold) in project area; <input type="checkbox"/> Rare natural community <input type="checkbox"/> T&E species habitat <input type="checkbox"/> None	

Keene Conservation Priorities Checklist

7.	Wildlife Corridors	Refer to GRANIT View – Select Wildlife: Wildlife Corridor Data. You can also access this data via the NH Fish and Game website	<input type="checkbox"/> Project area includes a Wildlife Corridor <input type="checkbox"/> Project area is adjacent to a Wildlife Corridor <input type="checkbox"/> No Wildlife Corridor identified	
8.	Historic or cultural site, structure or features	Parcel has historical or cultural features such as a cemetery, archaeological site, or other example of heritage.	<input type="checkbox"/> More than one such feature exist on the property <input type="checkbox"/> One such feature exists on the property <input type="checkbox"/> No such features exist on the property	
9.	Scenic views, High elevation lookout, Expansive views from roadway or trail, etc.	Parcel features scenic vistas visible from public roadways, public trails or waterways.	<input type="checkbox"/> Parcel features extensive Scenic Vistas <input type="checkbox"/> Parcel exhibits some Scenic Vistas <input type="checkbox"/> No Scenic Vistas	
10.	Project has Unique Geologic Features or other natural resources of local importance	Parcel features Unique Geologic Features or other natural resources (e.g. vernal pools, old growth forest, pollinator habitat, exemplary natural communities, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Parcel features extensive Unique Geologic Features or other natural resources <input type="checkbox"/> Parcel exhibits some Unique Geologic Features or other natural resources <input type="checkbox"/> No unique features	

**CITY OF KEENE CONSERVATION COMMISSION
GUIDELINE FOR ACQUIRING LEGAL INTEREST IN CONSERVATION LAND**

DRAFT 2026

Establishment of Conservation Land Acquisition Criteria

It shall be the policy of the City of Keene to establish and adhere to the following procedures when using Conservation Funds to acquire any interest in real estate for conservation or open space purposes. These guidelines shall be followed by all representatives of the City government and staff or groups/organizations that bring land projects to the Keene Conservation Commission.

In accordance with these guidelines, projects may be brought forward to City Council by City Staff or by a representative to the Conservation Commission. Contracts for the acquisition of any interest in real estate shall be approved by the City Council or its specified designee.

Process for Action on a Project

Any proposed project shall first be brought before the City Administrator for review. The City Administrator may submit the project, or portions thereof, to the City's legal counsel for review.

Once the City Administrator is satisfied that the project package is complete and the draft real estate contract is satisfactory, the project shall be brought before a meeting of the Conservation Commission. Members of the City Council and the City Administrator will be extended a courtesy invitation to attend this meeting and any site walk that is scheduled.

The Conservation Commission shall schedule a site walk, review the proposed project package at a public meeting, invite and consider any public input provided at the meeting, and recommend to the City Council to fund the proposed project with or without amendments, or not fund the project.

After receipt of the Conservation Commission's recommendation, as well as a recommendation by the City Administrator, the City Council shall schedule the proposal for discussion at a regular meeting and determine whether to move the project forward to public hearing. If the Council is inclined to move ahead with further consideration of the project, it shall hold a duly noticed public hearing on the proposed project. "Duly noticed" for purposes of this section shall mean the publication of a notice at least five (5) days preceding the date of said hearing in any newspaper distributed in the City of Keene, with such notice stating a brief explanation of the project and information as to where and when any interested person may review information on the project in more detail. In addition, such notice shall be posted in at least two (2) public places. The Council may request a site walk of the parcel at any time during this process.

If the project moves to public hearing and after considering public input, the Council shall discuss and vote whether to authorize the City Administrator to enter into the proposed contract with the landowner as presented or amended. If the City Council wishes to amend any of the use or management provisions from that which was presented to the Conservation Commission in the project package, it shall refer such proposed amendments to the Conservation Commission for review and comment prior to the City Council taking final action. Any vote to authorize funding for the project shall also specify the funding source and authorize funding of the due diligence procedures specified in the contract.

Project Description

All projects presented to the Conservation Commission and City Council shall describe:

- i. the project and property;
- ii. the funding source(s);
- iii. the use and management recommendations (only for properties to be acquired in fee- simple);
- iv. the draft conservation easement (only for conservation easement acquisitions);
- v. how the project fulfills the “CITY OF KEENE CONSERVATION COMMISSION LAND PROTECTION CRITERIA”

The draft real estate contract (e.g., purchase and sales agreement, option, etc.) and easement, if applicable, shall also be included with the project package. Further, any supporting documentation such as the appraisal shall be made available. If the project is a conservation easement, the project package shall include the recommended easement holding entity and a recommendation for funding for stewardship of the easement.

Additional Materials Required When the City Will Hold a Legal Interest in the Property

Any project brought forward to the City Council that involves the City’s full ownership (i.e. fee-simple) of land:

- i. shall include recommendations on permitted and prohibited uses on the property;
- ii. shall include recommendations for management (e.g., town forest or natural area) and stewardship needs (e.g., gates and signs);
- iii. shall recommend a formal means of ensuring the property has legal conservation restrictions (e.g., an easement to a third party);
- iv. shall recommend appropriate management oversight (e.g., conservation commission, parks and recreation, etc.) for the property; and
- v. should include an outline of stewardship and land management of the property. Such a outline may include the level and type of management needed for the property; the expected cost of this management; the party responsible for management and the ability of the City to take on management.

Any project brought forward to the City Council that involves the City holding a conservation easement:

- i. shall include the draft conservation easement for the property;
- ii. shall recommend the appropriate City body to steward, monitor, and enforce the easement; and,
- iii. should include a contribution to an easement stewardship fund for annual monitoring of the easement and any costs that may arise from said easement, such as enforcing easement violations. Such a contribution is desirable but shall be required only if so specified by the City Council after consideration of relevant factors such as the likely level and type of management needed for the property; the expected cost of this management; the ability and willingness of the party conveying the property to contribute to a fund; the availability of other funding sources to support management of the property; and the value, quality, and appeal of the property.

Appraisal

All acquisitions of real estate interest shall be for no more than fair market value as determined by an appraisal prepared by a New Hampshire licensed general real estate appraiser. The requirement for an

appraisal may be waived by the City Council if the value of the real estate can be shown to be less than fair market value. Funding requests for appraisals may be made directly to the Conservation Commission, City Administrator, or City Council.

Real Estate Contract

The draft real estate contract shall include the following provisions:

- i. the right to conduct a title search to ensure there are no title defects, and to ensure the landowner has the rights being sold. Should title defects be found or the landowner cannot deliver the interest in real estate, the City may terminate the contract, in which event all monies deposited by the City shall be refunded;
- ii. the right to conduct an Environmental Hazard Assessment (EHA). Based upon the EHA, the City may, at its discretion, terminate the contract, in which event all monies deposited by the City shall be refunded;
- iii. the right to conduct a property survey; for an easement project, if the landowner has a mortgage, the mortgage shall be subordinated to the conservation easement.

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.