

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, February 10, 2026

8:15 AM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Paul Bocko, Chair
Suzy Krautmann, Vice Chair
Kelly Cook
Arthur Winsor
Leslie Casey

Staff Present:

Carrah Fisk-Hennessey, Parks and Recreation
Director
Bryan Ruoff, City Engineer

Members Not Present:

Dian Mathews
Thomas Haynes, Alternate

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Bocko called the meeting to order at 8:15 AM. Roll call was conducted. Chair Bocko stated that they need to add an agenda item to elect a Chair and Vice Chair.

2) Approval of January 13, 2026 Meeting Minutes

Regarding the Minute Taker's question on Line 13 about Kate's last name, ARPAB members stated that they do not know.

Regarding lines 271 and 272, ARPAB members questioned whether "charette" is the correct term, and others replied yes. ARBAB members asked if "the Rhode Island School of Design" is correct, and others replied yes.

Ms. Cook made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of January 13, 2026. Ms. Krautmann seconded the motion, which passed by a vote of 4 to 0. Mr. Winsor abstained.

Chair Bocko stated that they need to elect a chair and vice chair.

Ms. Casey nominated Paul Bocko for Chair. Mr. Winsor seconded the nomination, which passed by unanimous vote.

Ms. Cook nominated Suzy Krautmann as Vice Chair. Mr. Winsor seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Ashuelot River Dam – Bryan Ruoff, City Engineer

Chair Bocko welcomed Bryan Ruoff, City Engineer.

Mr. Ruoff stated that the reason he is here today is that the Engineering Division, as part of one of the planned CIP improvements, bid the design services, publicly requesting proposals from engineers for either the repair or the removal of the Ashuelot River Dam. He continued that through the bidding process from the engineering consultants, they discovered that the scope of doing an “and/or” added a lot of cost and a lot of permitting uncertainty that would require more studies for the design. The Engineering Division is always looking to maximize the tax dollars that go to projects. They did not award the project, based on the qualifications they received. Instead, they are now doing public outreach associated with the two options for this work.

Mr. Ruoff continued that to back up a little, in 2009, the City received a letter of deficiency from the NH Department of Environmental Services (NHDES), regarding the existing dam. Some of the problems the City could address on its own, such as vegetation, maintenance, and minor repairs. Others were problems the City could not address in house, like seepage around the gates, seepage through the existing stone masonry structure, and leakage through the gate valves for the system. The City did everything to address that NHDES letter not to incur fines, and now they are looking to move forward on finalizing the repair or removal of the dam. From an engineering standpoint, looking at the data that has been compiled to date, there are pros and cons with each decision.

From their standpoint as engineers, there is not necessarily an impact, as far as flood water downstream, which you would normally imagine in removing a dam. The whole intent of a dam is that it holds back water, so it does not travel downstream too fast. As part of the investigation, NHDES performed a 100 Year Flood Spillway Analysis and identified that in the 100-year flood event, which dams are designed for, there is no increase in outflow from this structure from what comes in. Essentially, what comes in comes out. Thus, from an engineering perspective, it does not make a difference whether it is removed or not.

Mr. Ruoff continued that the stone and masonry structure was constructed in 1919. As with the bridges that were constructed in the 1920s, they are at the point where they have to do something with them. Planned into the CIP, the City has money to do the more expensive option, which is repairs and modifications to the existing structure. Either way, whether the decision is to repair or remove the structure, there will be some kind of infrastructure implemented that meets NHDES requirements. That would be some kind of aquatic habitat interconnectivity, and some kind of fish ladder would be designed either way.

Mr. Ruoff continued that in response to the NHDES’s letter of deficiency, in 2012, the City commissioned a study by an engineer consultant, DuBois & King. DuBois & King did some preliminary hydrology and hydraulic calculations to determine what the impacts would be and did some conceptual designs, which the pictures do not do justice. The pictures show a flat river through the area, which would not be the case. There would still be some kind of spillway because there is a 15-foot vertical drop between where the water level is now at the higher level and the lower level.

DuBois & King identified the pros and cons of removal, because essentially, repairing and modifying the dam would result in the same infrastructure that is there, just improved to meet NHDES's requirements. DuBois & King cited that the flood elevation at the spillway, which is at the park area, would be reduced vertically by about four feet. Continuing upwards on that tail water condition, about halfway to the overpass where Rt. 9 goes over the road, at that point, there would be no improvements to flooding. So, about halfway from the spillway to Rt. 9, there is about a two-foot vertical difference on the floodplain. To the north of the spillway, all of that is in the floodplain. The entire river corridor is in the floodplain. To the north, most of the area adjacent to the river are existing wetlands, so with the removal of the dam, there is some benefit in the floodwater elevations. There could also be unknown impacts to the wetlands. It could potentially reduce the wetlands storage and associated aquatic life; they do not know. It would have to be studied. But it is likely that that would happen—if there was less water backing up, there would be fewer amphibious creatures.

Mr. Ruoff continued that a pro DuBois & King identified was there would be an eight-mile connectivity of the fish stream of the Ashuelot River. There would no longer be a stopping point as there is now, at the pond and the spillway. It would be continuous for eight miles to the next dam, which would be the next impoundment point. A benefit to removal would be aquatic life continuity, but the downside would be that some aquatic creatures need greater depth for spawning.

Mr. Ruoff stated that the Engineering Division is looking for the ARPAB's feedback on what their preference would be. They do not need to come to consensus. He is looking for the ARPAB's feedback on what could be included in the scope. For example, the Engineering Division is looking at the potential scope of removing the spillway of the dam. With that, he sees no reason to remove the masonry blocks on either side of the spillway. They look good, and they are acting as a retaining wall. If replacing it, they would put in more modern retaining wall which would not work, in his opinion, with the historical look that it has now. That is an example of the type of feedback the Engineering Division is looking for, to clarify the scope, so they can ask an engineer to design this for construction and address all of NHDES's concerns. They call this existing structure a "dam," but it actually does not meet NHDES's definition/criteria for a dam, which is one of the reasons why NHDES is saying the City has to do something with it.

Mr. Ruoff asked for questions or feedback.

ARPAB members replied that the Ashuelot River has an endangered species, the dwarf wedge mussel, and asked if they have looked into how that species would be affected. Mr. Ruoff replied that as part of the Lower Winchester St. project, staff identified that in that area. He continued that a study would need to be done to see what would need to be done to maintain the habitat for the dwarf wedge mussel. That would be included, regardless of whether the dam was removed or repaired.

Mr. Winsor spoke about the soothing sound of the dam and how it softens the traffic noise of West St. He continued that this waterfall is incredibly beautiful and he would hate to see it go. He prefers the City do everything it can to keep it.

Mr. Ruoff replied yes, he should have said, a con would be the loss of the waterfall aesthetic, its historic significance, and its sound. Others agreed that the waterfall and its soothing sounds are important, noting that it is an asset in the Ashuelot River Park Master Plan.

Ms. Casey stated that at the charette, one option was to have staggered boulders in the part beyond where the dam was removed, which might sound like water rushing over stones in a brook. Others agreed that they were interested in whether that would be an option. Mr. Ruoff replied that it would need to be, because there is a 15-foot drop. He continued that something will need to transition that water to the lower level. There would still be a spillway of sorts, although not as loud as a waterfall. It would not have that cascading feature, but it would have a more natural look. It is likely what the City would need to implement for NHDES to permit the changes.

In response to a question about what a fish ladder would look like, and whether that could replace the waterfall, Mr. Ruoff replied yes, it would be in place of the waterfall. He continued that you build up stream bed material at a certain slope where the fish are able to work their way back up that instead of trying to jump 15 feet. The incline would be gradual enough to allow fish to travel up it. Some version of a fish ladder will be installed, whether the dam is removed or not.

Ms. Cook asked if he is saying removal is less expensive. Mr. Ruoff replied yes, removal of the structure is identified as about 25% less expensive than repairing, rehabilitating, and modifying the structure. Ms. Casey stated that that would essentially be a permanent solution. She continued that 100 years from now, there would be no need to do repairs. Mr. Ruoff replied that that is a great point—if the decision is to repair and modify the structure, at some point in the future, it will have to be revisited.

Mr. Winsor restated that he would hate to see the dam go. He continued that as Mr. Ruoff mentioned, it is part of Keene's manufacturing history. It is important to try and maintain. Chair Bocko stated that he is happy to hear Mr. Ruoff is already thinking about how they would not need to remove the stone masonry, even if the dam is removed. That historical evidence would be there, which is important for education. Others agreed.

In response to a question about whether bedrock is under that 15-foot drop, Mr. Ruoff replied that he does not think it is bedrock right at the splash point. He continued that there are boulders and cobbles, and there is a certain depth of stream bed material, about two or three feet, and that under that is likely more of a defined bedrock.

In response to a question about what effect removal of the dam would have on the water level that is generally seen at the park, Mr. Ruoff replied that the pond level would be about four feet lower, which is significant. He continued that further up, by about the hospital, the water level in the river would be about two feet lower. It would decrease the footprint of flood area. Canoeing would be difficult. There would not be that deep pool anymore; it would be more a continuous flow.

ARPAB members asked if water birds would be affected. Mr. Ruoff replied that they would likely be impacted. He continued that the Infrastructure Project Manager reminded him that fire training would be affected, too, along with paddle sports. If the dam were eliminated, it might not eliminate the possibility of paddle sports, but it would put restrictions on it, for sure, and it would not be the same as it is now.

Ms. Krautmann asked if Mr. Ruoff will be going before the Monadnock Conservancy. Mr. Ruoff replied yes, staff wants their input. He continued that they are seeking the ARPAB's feedback first, and then staff would want to present it to Council and other committees and even have public hearings. In the public hearing, they would want to say what the ARPAB and Council recommend, to make sure everyone is fully understanding and educated about the issues. They do not want to get feedback that steers the direction of the project in a way that does not meet objectives of the committees and Council.

Councilor Haas stated that removal would mean loss of wetlands upstream, but creation of wetlands where the pond is now. He continued that the shoreline of the pond goes away, and the stream is there, but the shoreline probably would become wetlands. Discussion continued.

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey asked what it would look like in drought conditions. Mr. Ruoff replied that it would look rather bare, and you would probably see things you have not seen before in there. Chair Bocko replied that as climate change continues, the conditions will be variable, not necessarily just increased drought. Mr. Ruoff stated that the letter of deficiency came in 2009, and he questions the accuracy of the flow numbers in it. He continued that he did some quick calculations and found that current conditions are about a 33% increase from the 2009 flow conditions. There is variability of extreme storms, as it seems like they get no storms and then a massive storm. When he started his engineering career, they designed for the two-year storm event. Now they design for the 50-year storm event.

Chair Bocko stated that he was thinking that regardless of whether the dam is removed or repaired, there is an opportunity here for education, maybe involving classrooms if they feel so moved. He asked if there is any opportunity for that interpretation in the funding, or if this is just straight up structural. Mr. Ruoff replied that he thinks there is an opportunity for education. He continued that they have been approached by a couple of schools, for students doing various projects and the City is open to facilitating student projects. He wishes they received more of those requests, because there is a lot more that can be uncovered by multiple people looking at the same problem. Chair Bocko replied that he is glad to hear that, and maybe the ARPAB can help promote those educational opportunities.

Mr. Winsor asked how soon Mr. Ruoff thinks something will have to be done with the dam. Mr. Ruoff replied that money is allocated for FY 27, which starts in July. He continued that however, he does not think they will realistically be ready for construction for at least 18 months. The necessary permitting and studies will likely take at least a year, maybe two. They also need strong public feedback, and they need everything to be well-documented to explain why the City makes the decision that it makes. It needs to be well understood both by the public and by the permitting agencies, because this is the type of project that is difficult to permit. It has potential environmental impacts either way, and all of those need to be accounted for. He thinks the

construction could potentially be in 2028, depending on the engineering studies and environmental studies.

Ms. Krautmann stated that back in 2009 or so, the University of Rhode Island was looking into whether the dam could generate power again. She asked if that is going anywhere. Mr. Ruoff replied no, not right now. He continued that it was determined to not be feasible for that location, given the permitting and all the aspects that would be necessary. It seemed like it was going to happen, and then they decided it was not going to make sense. Discussion continued. Ms. Krautmann stated that she wonders if it could be feasible now, since things have changed since 2009 and there have been advances with solar. Mr. Ruoff replied that he will check the file to see what information they have. He continued that if the same constraints are around today, it is unlikely to be implemented, but if changes to technology or changes to the flow have changed the feasibility of it, the selected consultant could potentially review that as part of the study. Discussion continued about the flows. Mr. Ruoff noted that there is huge variation between the high flows and low flows. He continued that due to climate change, they are getting more drought periods, along with an occasional heavy, intense storm, and designing something to utilize that, at this location, probably does not make sense.

Mr. Ruoff stated that today's conversation was to get the ARPAB members thinking about these issues. He continued that he is happy to come back to the next meeting, if the ARPAB wants, for any follow-up. He has questionnaires for people to fill out sometime after the meeting, regarding what their preferences would be. Then, staff would be looking for a summary from the ARPAB, via the meeting minutes or a short memo, on what their recommendation is for moving forward. He thinks the next logical step would be to present at the Heritage Commission and the City Council, with a summary of input received from the ARPAB, and then a presentation to the public. NHDES will provide an updated letter of deficiency, based on the current NHDES regulations, expected by the end of March. Staff would then look to readvertise for engineering services based on the feedback they received and the revised scope, in early to mid-June.

Chair Bocko asked if it would be okay for the ARPAB to get him the memo in a month, or if Mr. Ruoff needs it sooner. Mr. Ruoff replied that a month is fine.

4) Friends of Ashuelot River Park Arboretum Report

Ms. Casey stated that last time the Friends met, they went over what money they have and what plants they have. She continued that they have some plants that are ready to go into the park, and money for some shrubs and possibly more seedlings, but they are also thinking about the "soft landing" concept where they put layered vegetation around the base of trees, especially ones like oaks that have a lot of invertebrate life in their canopies. That helps them overwinter and gives them a way to complete their life cycle. When they talk about their budget, they will consider money for at least a proof of concept for a soft landing. That will be good for educational purposes, too. The Friends are looking to work with the various garden clubs to get everyone under one umbrella, working towards implementation of the master plan. They are looking into becoming a registered arboretum. Mr. Winsor replied that that is a difficult process, but it can happen.

Ms. Casey continued that the snow is again piling up (where the accessible parking spaces are). Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that she reached out to the Mascoma Bank manager this morning.

Ms. Casey stated that one more thing to report is that the Caterpillar Lab has a movie coming out, which should be interesting. She continued that they do not have the date yet.

- 5) **Project Tracking**
 - A) **Permanent Sign**
 - B) **Bird Ecology**

Chair Bocko stated that they will address the 6th agenda item before the 5th, because he thinks these two projects—the permanent sign, and bird ecology—are relevant to the budget discussion. He continued that the ARPAB has said at least a couple of times that the permanent sign project needs a working group.

- 6) **Recent/Upcoming Events**
 - A) **Pollinator Palooza – Day Change – Saturday 6/27/26 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM**

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that the Cheshire County Conservation District always runs the Pollinator Palooza at Ashuelot River Park. She continued that they have typically run it during the week. This time, they requested to be able to use the park on a Saturday in hopes of improving foot traffic.

Chair Bocko asked if there were any other events to talk about.

Mr. Winsor stated that the Monadnock Conservancy building is going up quickly. He continued that they hope to be in there by June. He looked at the landscape plan and saw that it is rather generic. The Monadnock Conservancy gave him permission to come up with some climate-resilient trees, to be like a showcase for what you should plant in your yard, just like the park is. At the last meeting, they discussed climate-resilient trees, and when you stop and look, you realize that not a lot of research has been done yet, but it is starting. The idea is for the Monadnock Conservancy's landscaping to complement what the park has, and to keep it a learning place.

Discussion continued. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that someone anonymously donated \$35,000 to develop a concept design for the other section of the green space where the Conservancy is.

- 7) **Finance Report**
 - A) **Calendar Year 2026 Budget (Trustees in March)**

Chair Bocko stated that the finance report is in the agenda packet. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that this year, the ARPAB had \$14,500 - trust funded. She continued that she is passing out copies of the updated estimate from Bartlett Tree. She and Mr. Winsor can talk a little bit about the meeting they had with James Tatum. The ARPAB has spent \$7,700. They currently have a balance of \$6,772. She put in what their lines were when they entered this calendar year budget cycle, but they entered this calendar year budget cycle in June. She wants to remind everyone

that she was under the impression that it was a fiscal year calendar that mirrored the City with a July 1 start, but she was informed that it was not; it is a calendar year budget with a January 1 start. They are already a month into this calendar year, and she would like to be able to present to the Trustees in March so that they can move forward with what they would like to use, and how. As a reminder, the budget is a percentage of the interest that comes in from the trust.

Regarding a question of whether the \$5,500 from Bartlett Tree is on target, Mr. Winsor and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey both replied yes, they think so. ARPAB members noted that \$5,500 is a much lower figure than the last one. Mr. Winsor replied that apparently, they are up to speed with the inventory, which is good news.

Chair Bocko stated that something he would like to put on the table, partly because there is less needed for Bartlett Tree this year, is the idea of the ARPAB allocating some money for the permanent sign project, and if possible, also some money to actually implement the bird ecology project. He continued that he does not think he could get an estimate ready for that, but they could reasonably allocate some money for it.

Friends members asked whether invasive species treatment will still come out of this budget, or if that is now done through Public Works. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that hopefully, it is more of a City-wide initiative now, but she thinks it would be smart for the ARPAB to keep some money for invasive species in reserve within this budget, because the park is an important facet and amenity for the city. Friends members replied that \$1,000 seems reasonable, and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey agreed.

Regarding landscaping, Friends members stated that mulch will essentially be free now, from the City. They discussed whether they are okay with compost for this year or whether they will need more and spoke positively about the compost they got from Mr. Anderson last year. Friends members stated that budgeting \$500 for compost would probably be reasonable. The Friends continued that they think \$1,000 would be reasonable to budget for the “soft landings,” in the “replanting” or “landscaping” category.

Mr. Winsor asked if they should budget for potential tree removal, because there might be some trees that need to be thinned out. Discussion ensued and ARPAB members agreed that \$1,500 for a tree to be removed seems reasonable.

Chair Bocko asked if landscaping is staying at \$4,000. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey and others replied no, that can be brought down to \$1,500. Chair Bocko continued that Bartlett Tree is at \$5,500. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that she will double check on the inventory. She and Mr. Winsor were both surprised that Bartlett Tree shared that the inventory had been done. If it has not, ARPAB might need to add about \$2,000 for the inventory.

In response to a question about Mr. Winsor’s idea for tree identification tags, Mr. Winsor replied that he has not done much with that yet, but he thinks it would cost around \$300.

Continuing down the list, Chair Bocko asked if \$500 for replanting is correct, and \$1,000 for invasive treatment. Others replied yes. Chair Bocko continued that he proposes adding \$2,000

for educational signage, and they could add \$300 to that for tags. He heard others propose a tree removal for \$1,500. He has not done the math, but all of that together gives them a budget that would be well under last year's \$14,500. Others replied that it sounds reasonable and comprehensive.

Friends asked whether the cost of the water pump will come out of the City's budget. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied yes.

Friends asked whether Chair Bocko's proposed \$2,000 for the signage includes hiring an outside person to do the sign's design. Mr. Winsor replied that contrary to last month's discussion of how Peter Poanessa would not do the design, he thinks Mr. Poanessa would, if the ARPAB gave him the right information. He continued that it is more that the ARPAB did not want Mr. Poanessa to take complete license of designing it and wanted to have a rough idea of what they, the ARPAB, wanted with the timeline and photos. Discussion ensued about the importance of the ARPAB being very clear with what they give to Mr. Poanessa so he understands what it is the ARPAB wants. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that another option is to seek assistance from graphic design students at Keene State College.

Chair Bocko stated that he thinks they have done a good job with the budget today. He continued that they do not have it written in front of them today, so the question is whether they can run with it now, or if they need to vote on it next time. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that she feels like the ARPAB has given her enough information today, so it is up to the ARPAB whether they are comfortable voting for the budget today, or if they want her to email the budget and the ARPAB can give consensus that way. Chair Bocko replied that he thinks they should do it through email. Others agreed.

8) New/Other Business

9) Adjourn – Next Meeting Scheduled for Tuesday, March 10, 2026

10) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Bocko adjourned the meeting at 9:18 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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