

**City of Keene**  
**New Hampshire**

**ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Tuesday, March 10, 2026**

**8:15 AM**

**Room 22,  
Recreation Center**

**Members Present:**

Paul Bocko, Chair  
Suzy Krautmann, Vice Chair  
Kelly Cook  
Arthur Winsor  
Leslie Casey (left early)  
Thomas Haynes, Alternate

**Staff Present:**

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

**Members Not Present:**

Dian Mathews

**1) Welcome and Call to Order**

Chair Bocko called the meeting to order at 8:16 AM. Roll call was conducted.

**2) Approval of Meeting Minutes of February 10, 2026**

Ms. Krautmann stated that on Line 314, “calendar” is misspelled.

Mr. Winsor made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of February 10, 2026, as amended.

Ms. Casey seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

**3) Finance Report**

**A) Calendar Year 2026 Budget**

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that the Trustees meeting is in a week, and she wants to make sure that she packages everything correctly regarding the proposed budget ARPAB talked about at its last meeting.

Ms. Casey stated that they had been discussing whether to do \$1,000 or \$1,500 for replantings. Raynee Carlson replied that they had said \$1,500. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that they would then be asking for a budget total of \$12,800. Others agreed.

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey asked the group to confirm that the proposed line items are correct. Discussion ensued. Mr. Winsor stated that they confirmed that the tree inventory was paid for.

Ms. Cook stated that they have money left over from 2025. She asked if that gets added in. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that it does not roll over; it gets absorbed back by the Trust.

Chair Bocko asked if there was further feedback on the budget proposal. Hearing none, Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that she will present this to the Trustees.

**4) Ashuelot River Dam – Bryan Ruoff, City Engineer**

Chair Bocko welcomed City Engineer Bryan Ruoff to speak about the Ashuelot River Dam. Mr. Ruoff stated that staff plans to attend the next Conservation Commission meeting to give the same presentation given to the ARPAB, and to get the Conservation Commission's input. He continued that they will also host a public meeting and get input from the public. Based on the combination of the public feedback, the feedback from the ARPAB, and the feedback from the Conservation Commission, staff will make a recommendation to the City Council on how to move forward. Staff received a few feedback forms from ARPAB members via Ms. Fisk-Hennessey, and received a few electronically, and they will start compiling that information. He is here today in case people had thought of questions or comments following last month's discussion. Unfortunately, the City still does not have a revised letter of deficiency from the NH Department of Environmental Services (NHDES), which is something they are waiting for.

Mr. Haynes stated that he sent Ms. Fisk-Hennessey some information this morning – a dwarf wedge mussel study they had on file, and a hydrological study the Conservation Commission had sponsored, which looked at the water levels. The Rhode Island School of Design's community workshop was really good, with visuals so people could see the differences between the alternatives, but he does not know if there was a final report from that, or if it is available. Mr. Ruoff replied that he believes so. He continued that the City commissioned DuBois & King to do as a study as well. He is aware of the dwarf wedge mussel study and hydrological study. The City had to do a similar study for the Lower Winchester St. bridge replacement, so they have all that information. He continued that he will confirm the report from the Rhode Island School of Design. Seeing visuals would help people a lot.

Ms. Casey stated that the Connecticut River Conservancy has a River Steward for NH. She continued that they have done many dam removal and mitigation projects. She asked if the City has the contact information for the NH River Steward and intentions on engaging with them. Mr. Ruoff replied that he thinks they do. Ms. Casey replied that she thinks the Connecticut River Conservancy would be better suited for this than the Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee. Mr. Ruoff replied that staff will reach out.

In response to Chair Bocko's question about NHDES, Mr. Ruoff replied that when the City was advertising for consultant qualifications, NHDES noticed that the letter of deficiency they had given the City was very old and based on NHDES's old regulations, and they wanted to give the City an updated one. He continued that NHDES said to expect that updated letter by late March.

Ms. Casey asked if NHDES reinspected the situation, or if they are assuming that the deficiencies from 2009 are ongoing. Mr. Ruoff replied that he thinks part of the reason the

timeline is late March is because NHDES needs to reinspect and then issue a new letter about how the dam is deficient based on NHDES's current regulations.

Chair Bocko asked if Mr. Ruoff could give broad strokes of the timeline. Mr. Ruoff replied that they are looking to get public input and City Council buy-in by approximately early summer. He continued that then they will advertise for engineering services again, based on the revised scope, which will not be for "either/or." Concurrently, staff will look for potential funding for the project. A couple of potential donors have reached out, which is exciting. Assuming they get funding, they anticipate the design would take about 18 months. Thus, they would be looking to do these improvements in approximately the summer of 2028.

Mr. Haynes asked if Mr. Ruoff is coming to the Conservation Commission meeting next week. Mr. Ruoff replied that it will probably be the meeting after that. Ms. Carlson stated that maybe he will have the revised letter from NHDES by the time he meets with the Conservation Commission. Mr. Ruoff replied that that would be great.

Mr. Winsor stated that at the last meeting, Mr. Ruoff described what it would look like if the dam were removed and how low the water would be, especially during a drought. He asked if there is a way to create that visual, because he thinks it would shock people. Mr. Ruoff replied that he thinks staff has that; he will see if he can dig it up. He continued that people seeing what it potentially could look like is crucial to the decision-making process.

Mr. Haynes stated that the visuals from the Rhode Island School of Design were helpful. He continued that many people gravitated to the option to remove the dam but create a boulder-filled stream that looked more natural to keep the water level at roughly the current height, and allow for sound. Ms. Carlson replied that she did not realize the idea was to have the rocks that tall, to keep the water up. Others agreed that the water height is of concern to many people. Mr. Haynes added that the hydrological study said if the dam was removed it would have huge impacts on the upstream water. Mr. Ruoff replied yes, all the way up to the Rt. 9 crossing.

Ms. Casey stated that she wanted to call out one thing in the Master Plan for Ashuelot River Park, relevant to this conversation: "*As visitors sit beside the historic West Street Dam, listen to the sounds of running water and the birds chirping, and feel the refreshing mist from the Ashuelot River, they feel a sense of comfort and sense of place.*" She continued that this was seen as a major asset to the city.

Mr. Haynes stated that he also knows that from the historical perspective, people who like to see Keene's history stay intact had strong feelings in regards to dam removal.

Chair Bocko stated that to Ms. Casey's point, there is a cultural landscape element as well, as part of the place, and looking at something that tells some of the story of the mill. Others agreed.

Chair Bocko stated that they will wrap up this discussion for now. He continued that ARPAB members will either be sending Mr. Ruoff feedback or have already done so. ARPAB members thanked Mr. Ruoff for coming.

After Mr. Ruoff left, Chair Bocko asked if they needed to talk about feedback collection, or if they were all set with that. Mr. Haynes replied that he did not fill it out because it felt too black and white to him, and he had a hard time fitting his thoughts into the formatting of the form. Because of that, he did not fill it out. Discussion ensued. ARPAB members suggested Mr. Haynes just write his comments on the form. Ms. Casey spoke about how Mr. Ruoff's presentation explained that staff found it was too costly to try and do all the studies for both options, mitigation or removal, and that they are at a fork in the road where they have to somehow choose just one path. Discussion continued, and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey added that Mr. Haynes/anyone can fill out the form by only answering the questions they want to answer, and by writing in as much as he/they want to.

Mr. Haynes asked if the hope is to have the ARPAB come up with a policy that comes from the ARPAB, as opposed to them just speaking as individuals. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that she thinks the plan was to use the ARPAB as type of a steering committee. She continued that Mr. Ruoff wanted concentrated feedback on the presentation, likely in the form of a letter, representing the board's recommendations/consensus. Chair Bocko replied that no one used the word "policy," and he does not think the ARPAB has that authority. Mr. Haynes agreed and replied that the ARPAB has the power to make recommendations.

Ms. Krautmann stated that it was really good that he said that about the flow and that it could be dug, because that did not come up. Mr. Haynes replied that his understanding is that people who do river engineering have ways of figuring that out. Ms. Krautmann replied that they had not known that was part of the Rhode Island School of Design.

Discussion ensued about how last month's meeting minutes say, "University of Rhode Island" and it actually should be "Rhode Island School of Design." Per other ARPAB members' feedback, Chair Bocko stated that they will not re-do the vote on the February meeting minutes to correct this, but today's meeting minutes will reflect that they noted this error.

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey asked if the information from the City Engineer got to the Friends. Ms. Casey replied yes, the Friends were unable to meet in person due to the snow, but met via Zoom, which made it a little harder to fill out a form. She continued that in her electronic submission of the form, she said that the feedback she was submitting was based on the discussion with the board, the Ashuelot River Park Master Plan, and the river corridor plan, and she gave her contact information.

#### **5) Friends of Ashuelot River Park Arboretum Report**

Ms. Casey stated that the Friends will be getting a fun bit of publicity – photos of the installation of the expanded pollinator garden will be part of a slideshow at the upcoming symposium for the Master Gardener Alumni Association, which is the group that funded the project.

Ms. Casey gave other updates from the Friends:

- The Friends know they have compost waiting in the park, frozen at the moment, which the Friends purchased and the City provided. Spreading the compost will be a top priority once the snow is gone.
- This year, they plan to put more educational content on the Friends' Facebook page, and highlight some of the park's features.
- They are exploring grant options, but there is no real clarity yet.
- The Caterpillar Lab movie is tonight at the library, at 6:30 PM.

Ms. Casey continued that for the bed where the Dawn Redwood will go, they will be working with the garden designer that Ms. Mathews made contact with. They will see if she is able to walk around and look at the rest of the beds. The Friends want to move toward having a small set of climate and "easy grow" themed plants that tie the different beds together, so they are tossing around ideas for that. Now that they are focused less on fighting invasives, they can think more about beautification and design.

Ms. Carlson added that another major project for this summer is the left-hand back side of the pollinator garden, under the amur cork tree. Mr. Winsor asked if they have noticed any seedlings coming from that tree. Ms. Cook replied that Ms. Mathews has mentioned the Caterpillar Lab people have noticed it. Discussion continued about how they love the tree and will monitor it, and do not want to cut it down unless necessary. Discussion continued about how it is unknown whether this cork tree is the source of small cork trees growing in the woods, or if those come from a different source. Friends members spoke about checking the cork tree in the spring to try and determine whether it is male or female.

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that regarding the snow piles at the handicapped parking spaces, she talked with Mascoma, and it was too late in the season to really do anything different. She continued that they have a better plan for next year, and they hope that works out. Mr. Winsor stated that they can ask the contractor where he plans to put the snow dumps. He continued that he has their contact information and could reach out. He thinks he is a well-intentioned person and just does not realize the problem. Discussion continued.

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that Antioch will be reaching out. They are wondering about their day of service. She did not know if the compost spreading would be something Antioch could help with. She cannot remember exactly when their day of service is, but she thinks mid-April. Discussion continued about how in previous years, Antioch helped with bird houses and clean up.

Chair Bocko asked if there was anything else from or for the Friends. Hearing none, he thanked Ms. Casey for the Friends' update.

**6) Project Tracking**  
**A) Permanent Sign**

Chair Bocko stated that he attempted to get the group together, regarding the sign project. He continued that he reached out to Mr. Winsor and Mr. Winsor answered, and then he himself did not answer back. Thus, the group has not met, but they will. There is no other update. Ms. Fisk-

Hennessey thanked the ARPAB for choosing to put the educational signage money into the budget.

Ms. Krautmann asked if the snow will affect the placement of the sign. Discussion ensued. Mr. Winsor stated that they need to talk with the contractor who does the snow clearing. Ms. Cook stated that they might need to put some gravel down. She continued that there are some bricks that go into the park and they have all kind of sunk down. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that that is something else she meant to put on the agenda. They can talk about it under “New/Other Business.”

**B) Bird Ecology**

Chair Bocko stated that he thinks the ARPAB’s priority is the permanent sign project, although he does not know if they had a big discussion about that. He continued that he personally thinks the sign project should be the priority, and if there is money available, they can implement some of the bird ecology project.

**7) Recent/Upcoming Events**

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

**8) New/Other Business**

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that when they were out re-decking the Ashuelot suspension bridge, the Infrastructure Project Manager noticed that all of the cobbles and stonework leading up to the bridge approach had sunk two to three inches. She continued that while all of the boards are nice and new and everyone can get across really well, there is a real issue there. The goal for this spring or summer is to lift that back up. Mr. Winsor replied that someone mentioned wheelchair access, too.

Ms. Carlson stated that if they expect a lot of traffic now around the sign, they may need something other than grass. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey asked if that would be an opportunity for the Friends to have a new location for the cobblestones. Ms. Carlson replied it might be, but she does not think they would be likely to sell that many cobbles. Maybe at least for the outside of it. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that she thinks new energy from people who were not here 30 years ago would sell some cobbles, and she herself would be interested in purchasing one. Discussion continued. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey asked the Friends to talk about it and stated that the City would support the effort.

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that the Mayor is looking for groups to be part of the Keene parade in July, the nation’s 250th birthday. She continued that each entity making the commitment to be part of the parade will receive a 3’ x 8’ banner. Discussion ensued about the possibilities for the Friends and/or ARPAB to be in the parade, with several members expressing interest. In response to a question, Ms. Fisk-Hennessey explained that the Mayor and Councilor Molly Ellis are working on the event with the Keene Downtown Group and the Cheshire County Historical Society.

Chair Bocko asked if there was any other new business. Mr. Winsor stated that regarding the planting of the Dawn Redwood tree, he knows Parks & Recreation staff get very busy with the ballfields in the spring, but he hopes they can install the tree as early as possible. He asked if Ms. Fisk-Hennessey could talk with Mr. Anderson and see what they can do.

Mr. Winsor stated that the Swanze Conservation Commission will show the film “Restoring Insects” on March 19, at 7:00 PM at Whitcomb Hall in West Swanze. He continued that everyone is invited. It is about connecting habitats through private properties so we can all restore nature in our own neighborhoods.

Mr. Winsor stated that he strongly encourages people to attend Stories About This Place, on March 27 at the Peterborough Town Hall. He continued that it is a Monadnock Conservancy event, free, and has some great speakers.

Ms. Casey left at 9:05 AM.

Mr. Winsor stated that regarding the building the Monadnock Conservancy is constructing, they did rework the landscape to be native plants, but it is only a strip of land like you would see in a parking lot. He continued that it will be fairly small because it will be under power lines, but it should attract birds and insects. The Monadnock Conservancy had the foresight to redo it so that it is native plants and complements the park. He hopes that after the building is up, they will slowly landscape it. What he is talking about today is landscaping the parking lot, not the building. He continued that the Monadnock Conservancy still plans to be in by June.

Ms. Krautmann asked what the story is with the rest of the land, the green space. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that the City secured an anonymous donation of \$35,000 for the design of a space that will include a natural playground, a canoe/kayak launch, flexible green space for events, a parking lot, and a public restroom. It is a very desirable project for Land Water Conservation funding, so they will apply for a Land Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant. That is a 50/50 match between the City and the grant. It is in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) as a proposal for a \$1,000,000 investment, meaning the City and donations they could secure \$500,000 and have the additional \$500,000 matched by LWCF funds. The project is being accelerated. Discussion ensued. Chair Bocko asked if the project will squarely be park land. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied yes, anything that they secure federal LWCF money for will remain a park in perpetuity.

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

There being no further business, Chair Bocko adjourned the meeting at 9:10 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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