

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, April 21, 2026

8:15 AM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

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

Staff Present:

Carrah Fisk-Hennessey, Parks & Recreation
Director

Members Not Present:

All Present

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Bocko called the meeting to order at 8:15 AM.

2) March Minutes Review

Mr. Winsor made a motion to approve the March 10, 2026 meeting minutes. Ms. Casey seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Ms. Casey stated that she wants to clarify an error in the March 10 minutes – the Friends of Ashuelot River Park Arboretum had recommended \$1,500 for replantings, not \$1,000.

3) Finance Report

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that the budget presented here is the one that was approved by the Trustees. She continued that they are working on developing a new project line for this year's calendar year budget, which should be done by the end of the week, and they will then be able to start using it. The Trustees appreciated that the budget request was lower than last year's. Chair Bocko stated that they will go forth and keep the budget discrepancy that Ms. Casey mentioned in mind. Discussion ensued about how there is \$1,500 in the landscaping line item and \$1,000 in the replantings line item, so there is flexibility there if needed.

Ms. Mathews asked where the “arboretum soil removal” happened. She continued that she wishes the removed soil could have gone somewhere else in the park. Mr. Winsor replied that the soil was not anything they would have wanted to save.

4) Friends Report

Ms. Mathews reported the following on behalf of the Friends of the Ashuelot River Park Arboretum:

- The Friends received a donation from Dorothy Arwe they are putting towards a bench, which the Friends will keep the ARPAB posted about.
- The Friends have a new cobblestone form.
- Friday, April 24, at 9:00 AM is the beginning of their gardening season, beginning with a walkabout.
- On the Friends’ Facebook page, they will do a “plant of the month” series and take and post photos of what is going on in the park.
- They continue to deal with invasive species and will start tackling the bittersweet that is on both ends of the bridge.
- Their major project will be continuing the pollinator garden. She spoke with Jen Campbell, a member of Monadnock Garden Club, who said she would be a liaison with the Friends. Ms. Campbell and Tiera Zehnbauser are doing a greenhouse project together. Ms. Campbell is a landscaping designer and might come to the park on the 24th and maybe she can help with what to do in the area around the Dawn Redwood.
- Tomorrow is the Antioch Work Day and the tree planting.
- Saturday, she signed the Friends up for cleaning up the Ashuelot River Park for Green Up Keene day. They welcome others to come and join them.
- This Friday through Monday is the City Nature Challenge with the Cheshire County Conservation Department. You go around and count species and record them on iNaturalist. Saturday, June 27, is Pollinator Palooza. People are really excited about it.

Ms. Krautmann asked about the greenhouse project. Ms. Mathews replied that it is on the beginning of Hurricane Rd. in back of the big canoe building. She gave more information about it. She continued that the Friends are glad to have Ms. Campbell as a resource.

Ms. Casey stated that she was talking with the director of the Monadnock Conservancy, Amanda Littleton, and she is very interested in coordinating the landscape plan with what is going on in the park. She continued that she suggested Ms. Littleton come to an ARPAB meeting. Mr. Winsor replied that she will come to next month’s meeting.

Ms. Mathews stated that a Friends member noticed that the park was “vacuumed,” and explained that the garden beds look bare, without the expected pinecones, sticks, cuttings, and so on and so forth. She asked if anyone knows what happened. Discussion ensued. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that the Parks staff removed all of that natural material to shred, and they will return it. Ms. Cook stated that she took an online class about the science behind the “leave the leaves” practice, and the number one takeaway she learned was that chopping the leaves up is just as bad as taking them off site. Discussion ensued. Ms. Cook stated that the ARPAB might want to look at

whether this is a practice they want to continue. Discussion continued about shredding leaves versus leaving them in place, and ARPAB members stated that they are open to learning more about this and thinking more about it. Ms. Mathews spoke in favor of shredding the leaves taken from the lawn, but not shredding the leaves in the beds. Ms. Cook spoke about how the leaf litter has the caterpillars and the spiders that are food for birds to feed their babies, and it is important for that to stay. Ms. Casey stated that she thinks this will be an ongoing discussion, and they should not let perfection be the enemy of the good. Chair Bocko stated that it sounds like it could be a hybrid going forward, leaving the leaves in the beds, but collecting, shredding, and returning the leaves from the lawn. Others agreed.

5) Project Tracking

A) Permanent Sign Developments

Chair Bocko stated that the sign working group met on Friday. He finally got the group together, which was Ms. Mathews, Ms. Krautmann, Mr. Winsor, and himself. He continued that they brought out materials people had, from Ms. Fisk-Hennessey and from when Mr. Bohannon was the staff liaison. They looked at some of the elements, discussed them, and came up with a rough design. The front of the sign would have the text of the history, with pictures, and the timeline would be on the bottom. The back would have a tree map and a trail map, and around that would be brief information and some QR codes to partners. They do not have an answer yet, but the group discussed that once they have the sign, they need to think about the best orientation for it, because it needs to be moved.

Mr. Winsor stated that the Monadnock Conservancy has a talented webmaster/graphic designer who does things like this. He asked Ms. Fisk-Hennessey if they could approach him and see if he could help design the sign. He could talk with him. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey agreed. Chair Bocko asked if there is a City of Keene branding guide that needs to be in the mix. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied yes, a lengthy and detailed one. Discussion continued about the sign design, and other members of the group added that they all agreed the sign should not be too “busy” or have too many words. Regarding a question about the timeline for the sign’s completion, Chair Bocko stated that he does not think they are there quite yet. They have several rough renditions of the design, but they need to hire someone to do it.

B) Bird Ecology

Chair Bocko stated that he has a student who will be working with him in the fall at the Nature Preserve. He continued that he thinks he will expand the job a little bit and have the student do some work where they do programs between the Park and the Nature Preserve, and he will ask him to move forward on some of the bird ecology project, such as the QR codes for a couple of them and the voiceover about birds along the trail. Before finalizing it, he will share it with the ARPAB for input. There needs to be some signage to point out that there is some bird ecology stuff. That could potentially be included in the other sign. Discussion ensued.

Ms. Cook stated that she went on the Harris Center walk last week. She asked if the wood duck house she saw on a tree is one that ARPAB built. Chair Bocko replied yes. Ms. Cook continued

that they saw bat houses, too. It was a great walk, and she saw wildflowers she did not know were in the area. She spoke more about the walk, and discussion continued.

C) Dawn Redwood Planting

Mr. Winsor stated that Pepper (Frank Anderson) has been great. He continued that maybe the students can help out with the planting of the Dawn Redwood, if needed, during the Antioch Day of Service. He continued that they will have to see how it goes. It will require some heavy equipment, which Mr. Anderson and his crew are doing. Ms. Mathews stated that she hopes someone who is there takes photos. Mr. Winsor stated that the Dawn Redwood will be planted 36 years to the day that Chuck Simpson planted the first tree in the park. Others replied that they should invite a reporter to come or take photos that they can submit.

6) Recent/Upcoming Events

A) Antioch Day of Service – April 22, 2026

Ms. Mathews stated that Antioch's Day of Service starts at 10:00 AM. She continued that they will be spreading compost everywhere they can.

B) Pollinator Palooza – June 27, 2026, 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM

C) ARP Pop-Up with KPRD – Tuesday, June 30, 2026, 1:00 to 3:00 PM

- i) Family Friendly: rock painting nature scavenger hunt, story walk, balloon games, yarn turtles, trail mix and water*

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that there will be a series of pop-ups in the parks over the summer, and the first is Ashuelot River Park one. She continued that it is an opportunity to bring the community together and enjoy being outside. There will be family-friendly activities for kids to have fun with, and staff wants to also promote all of the things that are available within Ashuelot River Park, such as the Story Walk, having the trails accessible, showing kids the Rachel Marshall Learning Laboratory, and so on and so forth. There will be four pop-ups, each on a Tuesday from 1:00 to 3:00 PM. She hopes to have the KPRD's Summer Guide completed by tomorrow, which will have more information.

Chair Bocko stated that he will get Ms. Fisk-Hennessey the information to revitalize the quest for treasure. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that that would be great to have that kind of geocaching in the park.

7) New/Other Business

Mr. Haynes stated that he learned that Keene is a Bee City, and now there is a sign saying so, on the road by Ashuelot River Park's entrance. He continued that having a sign is part of the requirements for being a Bee City. Ms. Mathews asked what else cities need to do to be a Bee City. Mr. Haynes replied that there are certain educational events to do, which are done through the Conservation Commission, and you have to do an annual report. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey added that someone with Pollinator Palooza is the direct link for Bee City USA for Keene. Discussion continued.

Mr. Haynes stated that Saturday, June 6, there will be a ribbon-cutting event at the new spillway bridge at Goose Pond. Discussion ensued.

Chair Bocko stated that a Department of Environmental Studies student who was referred to him was seeking a summer internship. He continued that they talked about several possible projects for the student, including the dam at Ashuelot River Park. He met with Bryan Ruoff, City Engineer, to talk about ideas, and then he, Mr. Ruoff, and the student met. There are details to work out, but the student will do a study over the summer, which will illuminate what would happen above and below the dam if it were removed, versus mitigated. The student is especially interested in species impact. Mr. Haynes asked if there are any updates about the dam. Chair Bocko replied that he did not hear any updates when he spoke with Mr. Ruoff. He continued that the updated letter of deficiency the NH Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) will be sending has been delayed. Discussion ensued. ARPAB members said they heard the NHDES has lost a lot of federal money. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey spoke about how that has resulted in NHDES charging municipalities significantly higher fees for things like dam inspections and alteration of terrain permits, which has significantly impacted the KPRD's budget.

Ms. Casey stated that at the last Friends meeting, there was general consensus that the Friends would be interested in participating in the 4th of July/250th celebration in Keene. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that that is great, and she can put the Friends in touch with the downtown group that is planning the event, spearheaded by the Mayor and Councilor Molly Ellis.

Mr. Winsor asked Ms. Fisk-Hennessey to talk about the Natural Stewards program that will happen in the fall. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that the KPRD is excited to be able to host the Natural Stewards program in Keene for the first time. She continued that it is through the UNH Cooperative Extension, run by their Urban Forester Jo Russavage. It is an 11-week program with classes on Fridays, and it is all related to Keene-specific issues, in terms of forest stewardship, land stewardship, and wildlife stewardship. It is a remarkable opportunity. One of the reasons Keene was chosen/accepted is because they are dealing with the Red Pine Scale. Discussion ensued.

8) Adjourn – Next Meeting Tuesday, May 12, 2026 at 8:15 AM

There being no further business, Chair Bocko adjourned the meeting at 9:02 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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