

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, May 12, 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 8:13 AM. Roll call was conducted.

2. Approval of April 21, 2026 Meeting Minutes

ARPAB members noted a correction to line 41 of the April 21, 2026 draft minutes: “Arwe” is the spelling of Dorothy Arwe’s last name, who donated the money being used for the bench.

Mr. Winsor made a motion to approve the April 21, 2026 meeting minutes as corrected. Ms. Casey seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3. Friends of Ashuelot River Park Arboretum Report

Ms. Mathews stated that she has a letter to read on behalf of the Friends, regarding their big issue. She continued that first, other things to report are:

- This month’s “plant of the month” on social media is Violet.
- The big Magnolia tree behind the kiosk has many roots coming out the bottom of the trunk. Bartlett Tree needs to cut them.
- The Friends will start going to the Farmer’s Market, with a table, with the Master Gardeners from UNH.
- They will have a float in the Monadnock 250th parade.

Ms. Mathews stated that every month when the Friends have a meeting, they update and talk about their projects. They have been dealing with the invasive plants and making progress. As they clear areas, they plant things. The problem is they are applying for and getting grants, and getting the plants, and a lot of the plants are not there anymore. She got a grant for \$1,000 from National Garden Club for some nice shrubs. Some of them have succumbed. There is no water in the beds. She has 22 flower pots at her house that she has been monitoring all winter, a new batch going into the pollinator garden. Talking about this raised a furor with the Friends, because they are again talking about lugging the 12 gallons of water in their wagon. They decided they have to do something, because it cannot keep going like this. Thus, they have written a letter, which she will read, and the ARPAB can discuss it.

Ms. Mathews read:

*“May 11, 2026
Keene City Council
3 Washington Street Keene, NH 03431*

Re: Ashuelot River Park water availability

Dear City Council Members,

In May of 2020, a survey taken as part of the research project asked citizens of Keene, ‘What do you like most about the Park?’ The highest was 26.5% who liked the garden beds. Next was 17.6% who liked the trees. The Friends of the Arboretum at Ashuelot River Park consider restoring the garden beds our top priority. But new plantings must be watered for the full planting season to become established in their bed, and we do not have the means to do it. Plants and trees that die due to lack of water are a waste of money and volunteer effort, and they set back restoration efforts for this beloved park.

The City's 2020 Ashuelot River Park Master Plan, ‘A Green Oasis,’ has a brief section on irrigation which states that the ‘Arboretum has a sprinkler irrigation system connected to city water in the southeast portion of the park. This relatively new system is dependable and irrigates both lawn areas and the perennial beds.’ (P20) THAT STATEMENT IS NOT TRUE and it is the reason the Master Plan did not include improvements for watering the Arboretum trees and the perennial beds. The Plan does have a recommendation to install drip irrigation to reduce water usage. Costing for installing a drip irrigation system in the beds gave a high estimate at the time of \$3,195. (P36)

We have long needed a system for watering the Arboretum trees and garden perennials, and it is reaching a crisis point for the Friends. We ask that the City work with the Park Advisory Board and the Friends Board to design and install an irrigation system as soon as possible. Otherwise, we cannot continue to maintain and improve the planted beds per our charter. It is just too hard on the volunteers. It would be sad if Keene's ‘Green Oasis’ again fell into disrepair for lack of investment in ensuring a water supply.

For context, currently the Friends volunteers source water from the river or from the West Street faucet using gallon jugs, 12 per trip, and a wagon. Each jug that is filled, toted, and poured weighs 8.3 lbs. The process is time-consuming and exhausting. As summer days are getting hotter with climate change, the Friends cannot keep this up.

The arboretum was recently gifted a Dawn Redwood tree valued at approximately \$10,000. It was discovered that the water tap was not turned on, so the tree was watered daily with jugs from the river. UNH Extension recommends that newly-planted trees be watered at least every other day with about an inch of water, or a half gallon per square foot of planted area. Eventually a water bladder on a truck arrived from the City to save the tree. This valuable tree will need intensive watering for at least 2 years and would benefit from a proper irrigation system.

Thank you for your consideration.

*Sincerely,
Dian Mathews*

*Chair, Board of Directors
Friends of the Arboretum at Ashuelot River Park
CC: Paul Bocko, Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board, Chair
Carrah Fisk-Hennessey, Parks & Recreation Dept., Director”*

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that the KPRD has sourced the large collection containers that they were talking about earlier, which they will be able to fill. She does not know how many gallons it holds, but it offers an opportunity to get water that is not from the river. They have had people talk about challenges with the irrigation system. They can have further discussion.

Ms. Mathews stated that if they have the water bladder at the shed, they still have to get the water to the beds. She continued that there is still the need for lugging. They have tried using hoses. Friends work for two hours at a time. The hoses take 30 to 45 minutes to lay out, and then they need to be put away, which takes away from valuable work time.

Chair Bocko stated that when they talked about this at a previous meeting, they came up with a “two phase plan” of sorts. He continued that he does not think anyone thought the water bladder was a permanent fix, but it was a start. The second phase would be to look at what could be done for water with the development of the new green space. Frank “Pepper” Anderson and Brett Ouelette came to a meeting and talked about it with them.

Discussion continued. Ms. Casey stated that the Friends do not want this to be adversarial. She continued that they want this to be in support of the volunteers who are being impacted by this.

In response to a question about the irrigation system, Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that her understanding is that the original irrigation system was left in the ground and is non-active, and that there is a new irrigation system that is in the ground which is active. The two systems do not

share controls and the old system has been phased out. Discussion ensued about how the old irrigation system is too old and cannot be revived.

Mr. Winsor stated that there are temporary ways to get water from the West St. tap, with black pipe that could be buried, at least to the center of the park so they have some water. He continued that that would not be a permanent fix, and it would still involve hoses, but not as much dragging. That would be less expensive than an irrigation system. He is not a fan of drip irrigation because you cannot just put it on a timer and walk away. He would rather see it watered when it needs it and not watered when it does not need it. Getting water from the West St. tap through buried pipes like this could be a temporary solution, if it turns out they have to wait two years for a permanent solution.

Ms. Mathews stated that she went through the Master Plan and marked every place that talked about water. She continued that she was flabbergasted when she realized she started doing this 10 years ago. It is time to solve this problem. The only reason she mentioned drip irrigation in the letter was because it was in the Master Plan as a suggestion.

Karen Flavin said Mr. Winsor's idea is worth considering in the short term. Mr. Winsor stated that at KSC, they had a water wagon. He continued that there was no irrigation. It was a tank that went on the back of a small machine, and that was how they watered plants when they needed it. Such a machine is expensive, however. There were times during the summer when someone's whole job was watering, all day. Ms. Mathews replied that that is what the Friends have been doing. She continued that as the Friends have said before, they have had people offer to volunteer, only to come once, say that the work is too hard, and change their minds. Last year, they were fortunate to have a great group of volunteers, watering three times a week for the new bed they put in.

Chair Bocko stated that Mr. Winsor has put an idea for a temporary fix on the table. He asked if anyone has any other short-term ideas. This emphasizes making this a big part of the green space development. Ms. Mathews stated that the Friends will take any help they can get. She continued that those plants she mentioned before need to be planted, and they are sort of dreading it, because of the work that will follow with watering.

Mr. Winsor stated that he thinks that in the short term, they should invest in a hose reel, so that it does not take so long to unroll the hoses. Friends replied that they currently use springy hoses, and they can mostly get across the bed with 150 feet, but they cannot get all the way back to the pollinator garden. If they had to use all the giant hoses to get places, yes, it would take a long time.

Ms. Mathews stated that they need to remember that some of the trees will be stressed. She continued that it is called an arboretum. They need to think about the trees, too. Ms. Casey stated that the Friends will do their best to water the trees and plants, but if having dead plants is what it takes to avoid the Friends getting heat stroke, so be it.

Discussion continued, and Chair Bocko spoke about how the ongoing drought is exacerbating the imperfect watering system. Friends members agreed.

In response to a question about what happens with the letter, Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that the letter will go to the City Council, and the City Council will likely refer it to the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure (MSFI) Committee. She continued that it will go on the MSFI Committee agenda and move forward from there, and yes, it would be very helpful if Friends members came to the MSFI Committee meeting.

Chair Bocko asked if Mr. Winsor's suggestion of black pipe is something they can explore with Mr. Anderson and his team. Mr. Winsor replied that he knows they are capable of doing it. Discussion ensued. Friends members suggested it could help with watering the Dawn Redwood.

4. Finance Report

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that they have a budget they can start thoughtfully using. She continued that the ARPAB has not spent any money in this calendar year, which is now halfway through, so they should start. She asked if there were any questions about the Finance Report.

5. Monadnock Conservancy

Chair Bocko welcomed guests from the Monadnock Conservancy and asked to hear from Amanda Littleton.

Ms. Littleton stated that the Monadnock Conservancy is excited to be neighbors of the Ashuelot River Park. She continued that this is a great opportunity to start open dialogue and conversations together, about updating the ARPAB on the Conservancy's timeline and plans, and talking about how they can support each other in this partnership and park expansion.

Ms. Littleton continued that to back up and briefly explain the Monadnock Conservancy, it is the land trust in southwest New Hampshire, serving 39 towns. They are based in Keene and are excited to be moving into their new headquarters. They primarily work on land protection, conservation easements and fee lands, which means lands the Conservancy owns and makes available for public access, such as through trails or water access. They are thrilled about their new space because they see it as an extension of their lands. They see the land as an opportunity to connect people in nature, land management and stewardship, and fostering care and love for the land. They have never really had a home where they could welcome people in and do educational events. This is their first opportunity to have such a space. There will be a community room, a small conference room that community groups can utilize, and they want it to be a hub of conversation for the region, partnering with people to bring in education and help foster that stewardship in the community. That is the Conservancy's community engagement goal for this place, and they hope it will help them foster their land protection efforts, which is their primary focus. The more people they can bring in and educate, the more people might be interested in choosing conservation for their land. They hope it will have ripple effects on the impacts of land conservation throughout the region.

Ms. Littleton continued that regarding the timeline, the Conservancy hopes to get their certificate of occupancy from the City of Keene in early June, and then they will slowly be moving in over the course of the summer. Their open house and annual celebration will be October 3. They

would love the ARPAB and Friends to join them for that. In the meantime, they will be trying to get settled in, and they will do some plantings. They are excited about how to utilize the land. Most of their space has been developed with the parking area and the building itself. Adjacent is a large swale, which is on the City property for the flood water retention. They do not have a lot of space for plantings, but for the areas they have, their focus is on native plants. They will start small and see how they can use the space. She and Mr. Winsor, who is a Trustee, have been working together to plan it.

Mr. Winsor stated that Ms. Littleton had asked him to look at the landscape plan that had been submitted, because it did not include all native plants. He continued that however, when he did it, he, too, suggested some things that were not native, so he and Ms. Littleton went back and forth on it. There will be some pollinator gardens. Ms. Littleton replied yes, they will plant blueberries and native trees, and in the 1,500 square feet that she is calling the “courtyard,” they will plant 16 species of native perennials. Thus, the Conservancy sees some alignment with all the work the Friends and ARPAB are doing, and they want to explore how they can support each other in partnerships, as the Conservancy becomes established in that space.

Ms. Casey asked if the Conservancy got the soil tested where they are planning to put plants in. She continued that the Friends have struggled with the blueberry and some of the other acid-loving plants. Ms. Littleton replied that the site has been swiped clean of all the soil that was there, and they are bringing in loam. She continued that that was tested and the pH is not super high, so she thinks it will be okay. That is a good point, though. Discussion continued about soil.

Ms. Littleton stated that the Conservancy has had an RFP out, with the City of Keene, for a designer for the natural playground, which is part of a larger park design for the expansion of those 2.5 acres, which they are really excited about. She continued that they have a partnership going with the Southwest Regional Planning Commission (SWRPC), through their Timber for Transit grant from the Northern Borders Regional Commission (NBRC). The Conservancy received a grant through the Putnam Foundation that they were able to utilize as a local match to leverage the NBRC dollars, so they can get a lot more of the design work happening this year instead of waiting another year for getting additional municipal funding to make that happen. The engineers working with the SWRPC will work on creating the holistic design for the whole park. She and Ms. Fisk-Hennessey sit on a committee where they will be working to help inform what that will look like and provide feedback throughout the process. Then, they will work with a subcontractor for this natural playground design. It is kind of a specialized focus for landscape architects to be doing and for educators to be collaborating on. The RFP was out for about a month, and has received a lot of interest, and four solid bids from experienced people. There is a meeting after this one to dig into that a little bit, and they will be interviewing all four candidates over the course of this month. It is an exciting opportunity to start looking at how to bring people into the park who do not typically use it. The arboretum is a wonderful place for passive recreation, walking and appreciation, and the natural playground will be a place for families with young children to engage and dig in. It will be a starting place to explore the rest of the park, a way to get kids excited from an early age.

Ms. Mathews stated that somewhere down the line, they could keep going from the natural playground, across the bridge, and do an outdoor classroom that would echo the design of that.

Ms. Littleton stated that two and a half acres is not huge, but there is enough space there that they are also exploring what else should be there, such as possibly outdoor classroom-type infrastructure that they can use. The Conservancy just hired a Community Engagement Manager who will be doing some youth education and adult education, so maybe they could have something like that in that space, such as pavilions and picnic tables, which others could use as well. The boat launch is a big piece, too. The Conservancy is thinking about all the possible pieces. Maybe there could be some educational kiosks, about the watershed or about wildlife. She liked what the Friends were just saying about their “plant of the month.” The Conservancy has been thinking about ways they could highlight what is happening in the region’s natural areas in different seasons.

In response to a question about whether there will be kayak access from the Conservancy’s parking lot, Ms. Littleton replied no, because of the giant swale between the Conservancy’s parking lot and the river. She continued that however, they are exploring, through the green space expansion, whether there would be a portage trail – a place where you could pull in and park and then have a shorter walk. They do not want to commit to anything right now, but there are lots of ideas to explore. This is a great time for people to share input and ideas, such as what the ARPAB and Friends think would be the most valuable. The Conservancy is very interested in hearing from them at this point in the process when the design is starting to take shape.

Chair Bocko stated that an Antioch instructor of the nature-based landscape course submitted a proposal. He continued that he is not sure if he is one of those four people the Conservancy will be looking at, but it is a good connection nonetheless. The Antioch library is now located where the physical therapy space used to be, and they will have a grand opening for that. The landscape, built and natural, is shifting. Between the Park, the City, the Friends, Antioch, and the Monadnock Conservancy, it is now a very different space. It is great to see it transforming. Ms. Littleton stated that David Sobel of Antioch is a part of the committee to help with the selection, given his deep experience with outdoor play and early childhood education. They are excited about that.

Ms. Mathews stated that she spoke with people from a local canoe association, and they were asking her what the building was. She was surprised that none of them knew it was the Monadnock Conservancy, so she was filling them in. Some of them might be good for the Conservancy to reach out to, because she thinks they would love the portage idea. Ms. Littleton replied that that is a great idea, and they have not yet spoken with any of those groups. She continued that another idea someone had was for the Conservancy to have racks for people to rent to store their canoes and kayaks. Those are the types of innovative ideas they are interested in hearing from people, wondering what people have seen in other locations that could be considered for this space as well. Discussion continued and someone suggested that could be a Timbers for Transit grant idea. Ms. Flavin stated that this sounds like a good opportunity for Master Gardeners to collaborate with the Conservancy to do some education. Ms. Littleton replied yes, they hope to continue conversations about how the Conservancy can be good partners to everyone, and about projects that could be collaborations.

Ms. Casey asked if there is a plantings plan they could see. Mr. Winsor replied that it is only a strip, basically a median, with native plants in it. He continued that it is not much right now, but there will be more, as time goes on, in terms of landscaping around the building with native trees. Ms. Littleton stated that she would be happy to share the spreadsheet she created with the list of perennials for the pollinators. Ms. Mathews stated that Ms. Littleton can email it to her.

Ms. Flavin stated that regarding the knotweed, they have finally sprayed herbicides, after many years of just cutting it down. She continued that it looks much better. Brief discussion ensued. Ms. Littleton stated that she is not a fan of herbicides, but in this case, it is good to hear that they did that.

Ms. Littleton stated that she has a question, and she is not sure who to ask, but she wonders who in the City she could talk to about management of the swale that is on City land. She continued that she has some ideas that she wanted to explore about that. She knows that in some areas, they cut it tight and there is a flood concern, so she wants to know what the limitations are. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that she should contact the Public Works Department. Ms. Mathews stated that the Master Plan has a 'dry swale,' a dry garden with a lot of rocks, and plants that like dry areas. It would look nice. Discussion ensued. Ms. Littleton stated that she was not sure if the City was going to cut it tight throughout the season, making it not worth the investment. Discussion continued about knotweed.

Chair Bocko and others thanked Ms. Littleton. Chair Bocko stated that they look forward to more conversations as they go.

6. Project Tracking
A) Permanent Sign

Chair Bocko stated that this is where Mr. Winsor comes in, and Martin Royle, who is here today from the Monadnock Conservancy. He continued that they have a plan for the sign. Mr. Winsor stated that they invited Mr. Royle because they knew they needed help. He does a lot of the graphic work for the Conservancy, and his work is very well done. He thinks Mr. Royle could look at what the ARPAB is trying to do and help make it happen. He gave Mr. Royle a copy of the presentation he and Ms. Mathews gave to the Kiwanis Club, and maybe there are other materials they could share with him. Maybe the small group could get together after this meeting to give Mr. Royle more details. They could definitely use his expertise. The temporary sign they put up has a lot of mileage.

Mr. Royle stated that he is thrilled to help. He continued that Mr. Winsor sent him a page of text and some photos, and he would be glad to talk with a small group after this meeting. His main question is whether the ARPAB is talking about one sign or multiple, and how big. Discussion ensued and ARPAB members and Friends gave information about the one, double-sided, kiosk-style sign, including the fact that it needs to be moved, because it is currently not angled properly. Mr. Royle asked if the text he received is final, or if there is still work to do. Friends and ARPAB members replied that there is lots more, maybe too much, which is why they need help. Mr. Royle stated that he could start with looking at how to use more succinct wording, and he will look at the physical sign so he can get a sense of it. Discussion continued. Chair Bocko

stated that the small group will meet after this meeting, to get into the weeds of it. Mr. Winsor gave an example of a sign Mr. Royle could look at, which shows what the ARPAB had in mind. Mr. Royle replied that he welcomes more example signs, which could be from anywhere. Chair Bocko stated that the ARPAB budgeted for this sign and they are excited to move forward. Mr. Royle asked if the group has a sense of what materials they want to use. ARPAB and Friends members replied no.

Chair Bocko asked if there were other questions or thoughts. Hearing none, he thanked Mr. Royle.

B) Bird Ecology

7. Recent/Upcoming Events

A) Pollinator Palooza – Saturday 6/27/26 11 AM to 2 PM

B) ARP Pop-Up – Tuesday 6/30/26 1:00 to 3:00 PM

Mr. Winsor stated that he and Ms. Mathews spoke to the Kiwanis Club last week, and he thinks the Friends got a new gardener out of that. Ms. Mathews replied yes, but she did not show up as expected. Mr. Winsor stated that the talk to the Kiwanis Club went very well. Ms. Mathews agreed, and added that the Friends sold a cobblestone.

8. New/Other Business

Mr. Winsor stated that when he worked at the college, they had street furniture that they tried to make sure stayed the same as what was existing. He asked if that is the plan for the bench, or if it is something different.

Ms. Flavin replied that there is some confusion. She continued that Ms. Fisk-Hennessey told her in the fall to get in touch with Mr. Anderson, who is in charge of the benches. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied yes, Mr. Anderson is the bench donation person. Ms. Flavin replied that she just wanted to double check that they were still supposed to be working through Mr. Anderson. Discussion ensued about how the Friends' plan is for the bench to be the same as what they have, but shorter.

9. Adjourn – Next Meeting scheduled for Tuesday, June 9, 2026

There being no further business, Chair Bocko adjourned the meeting at 9:15 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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