

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, June 9, 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. Roll call was conducted.

2. Approval of May 12, 2026 Meeting Minutes

Ms. Casey made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of May 12, 2026. Mr. Winsor seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3. Friends of the Ashuelot River Park Arboretum Report

Ms. Mathews gave the following update:

- The Friends are doing their ongoing, weekly work at the park, mainly on Fridays, but some people come on Saturdays.
- The “plant of the month” on their Facebook page is Bee Balm. The native bergamot is short, and a nice lilac color, blooming now.
- This Saturday, the Friends will be at farmer’s market, with a kit from UNH for master gardeners, and advertising for the park. They hope to get some volunteers.
- The Friends will do the Pollinator Palooza event, with an activity for children, advertising for pollinators, selling cobblestones, and advertising the park.
- They have started to work on ideas for their wagon float for Monadnock 250.
- Michelle Chalice sent the Friends a copy of a nine-page booklet on natives, from the conservation people in Peterborough.

Ms. Cook stated that something else to note is that the Friends got another new gardener as a result of Mr. Winsor's and Ms. Mathews' presentation to the Kiwanis Club. She continued that it is Eli Rivera, the Cheshire County Sheriff. He helped pull out a lot of the extra sunflowers.

Ms. Cook stated that another update she has is she thinks the cork tree is indeed male. Ms. Mathews replied that is good, but they still wonder which tree is reproducing the baby cork trees all over. Brief discussion ensued.

Ms. Casey stated that Tammy Adams, a volunteer gardener in the park, shared with the Friends a letter to the editor of the Keene Sentinel about a snapping turtle trying to dig through the knotweed tarp and getting frustrated and leaving. She (Ms. Casey) emailed Bret Thelan at the Harris Center and will wait to hear back.

Per Chair Bocko's request, Tammy Adams introduced herself. She stated that she is a master gardener and lives down the street.

Ms. Casey stated that it would be good to get advice from a naturalist about whether they need to do something to mitigate that, such as providing nesting material, or whether the turtle will go somewhere else and succeed elsewhere. Ms. Mathews replied that from her experience with turtles, she assumes the turtle would have moved to a different place. Brief discussion ensued about how the Friends and ARPAB do not want their efforts to eliminate knotweed to eliminate the turtles, but it is probably okay because the tarp for the knotweed is only a short section relative to the whole.

Ms. Mathews stated that Fish Migration Day was May 23, with an event in Hinsdale along the banks of the Ashuelot River to celebrate the day. She thinks this is something to add to their thinking about dam replacement or removal ideas, because it is mandated by law that once you get to a certain point you must have a fish ladder. Discussion ensued about whether Hinsdale has a fish ladder, and about other dams in the area. Ms. Mathews stated that the Keene dam is the fifth dam coming from the south. She continued that when a location has a certain number of fish that go over a dam, law mandates a fish ladder. Ms. Krautmann stated that she remembers the City Engineer saying a fish ladder would be part of whatever plan happens with the dam or its removal. Chair Bocko agreed. Ms. Mathews stated that she does not think it is imminent for the dam, so they have some amount of time, but she does not know how long. Chair Bocko stated that it sounds like they should invite the City Engineer to another ARPAB meeting to talk about this and get an update from him. Others agreed.

A. Water Access

Chair Bocko asked Ms. Fisk-Hennessey for an update. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that after the last meeting, when the Friends voiced concerns in a letter they presented, she asked Frank "Pepper" Anderson, Parks and Cemeteries Manager, to share updates via email, allowing the Friends and the Board to hear the accelerated forward movement over the last year and a half. She overviewed those in the finance report for the ARPAB and read Mr. Anderon's email for the group:

“Hi Carrah,

Just wanted to update you on where we are for the solution to get water over to the shed to help with watering that side of Ashuelot River Park. At the meeting Brett and I attended, we discussed adding a 300-gallon water tank near the garden shed and then installing a pump so that the Friends could connect a hose to help them water the areas that they were watering with gallon jugs. We agreed that they would use their hose to fill the tank from the spigot at the front of the park as needed while they were working in the gardens. Since then, we were able to find a donation for the water tank, which saved us \$500.

Here’s what we have done as part of the process. We have purchased a water pump for \$200. We’ve contracted with Amer Electric to install a new outlet and switch for \$500. Ryan [Amer] was actually there Thursday morning to install that. We purchased a 300-foot hose reel that we connected to the spigot outside the building for \$150, and then one of our staff has the plumbing parts to connect the tank to the pump. That will be done by the end of the week this week.

In addition to the water project, we have aided in picking up the Dawn Redwood and caring for it through the winter, as well as planting it in the spring on Earth Day, which was a giant celebratory success. We provided around 10 yards of our in-house made compost and organized a volunteer group to help spread it. We cleaned out the gardens last fall and blew the mulch leaves back into the garden. Because of an early winter, we had to go back this spring to blow the leaves back out because the trees hadn’t dropped their leaves completely. We mulched those leaves and piled them for future use on site near the compost bin. We hauled in several loads of surepak last summer to improve the walkway, scheduled a tree removal and stump grinding from old stumps around the park near the new garden at the back of the park and near the picnic table, and we hauled the knotweed pile to the Keene Transfer Station to be incinerated.

*Lots of positive things happening,
Pepper”*

ARPAB members and Friends expressed appreciation for Mr. Anderson’s update. Chair Bocko stated that the more long-term solution the group has talked about is what will be expanded City park, relative to the Monadnock Conservancy. There is nothing certain yet, but he thinks that when that is developed, the question is how they can integrate water there so there is better access.

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that she can give an update on the Ashuelot Green Space Project. She continued that she was part of the team that included Chloe Gross from Timber for Transit, Amanda Littleton from the Monadnock Conservancy, and Deputy City Manager Andy Bohannon. They reviewed all of the submissions for the natural play space opportunity they have going in there, and they selected a contractor to go forward. It is Lu-La, a landscaping firm from Massachusetts. Lu-La will be designing and preparing bid documents, and gathering lots of positive community feedback, starting with the ARPAB as the bridge to the community. All of the money for the concept design and bid documents was generously donated by a community

member - a \$35,000 gift to secure those services. ARPAB members and Friends expressed appreciation, and discussion ensued.

4. Finance Report

A. Bartlett Tree – Root Invigoration and Phytophthora Canker Bark Treatment

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that they just received an invoice from Bartlett Tree. She continued that they went out and investigated the park, and Mr. Winsor has a photo to show and he can talk about what Bartlett noticed. They did some root invigoration and found a phytophthora canker bark issue on the English Oak, so they applied a free initial treatment.

Mr. Winsor stated that it was the Friends who said, last year, that something was wrong with the English Oak. He continued that Jim Tatum, the new representative from Bartlett, is so attentive, quickly responding to the email to say he would stop by and take a look. Mr. Tatum gave a free treatment to the English Oak and it will require some follow-up, which will cost some money. He looked at the Magnolia that the Friends had mentioned. It is just shoots from the bottom. The Magnolia could use some pruning. He is impressed with Mr. Tatum's attentiveness, work, and knowledge.

Ms. Casey stated that the crab apple trees are beautiful this year. She continued that one pink crab apple tree is slightly struggling. It looks like it is hemmed in by resprouted cottonwoods or something. It is back in the corner, behind the sculpture. Mr. Winsor replied that he will go take a look at it. Discussion ensued.

Chair Bocko asked if there was anything else on the Finance Report. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that as they receive invoices from Bartlett Tree, she will make sure that she pays them out of the ARPAB's budget, and she will update the budget report to reflect those fees.

5. Project Tracking

A. Permanent Sign – Draft Review and Questions

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that Martin Royle emailed her last night and said he would get what he has worked on to her by the end of the business day. She continued that if the ARPAB can take a five-minute recess, she will go print Mr. Royle's email to share with the group. The ARPAB agreed.

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey returned and distributed copies of Mr. Royle's email. ARPAB members noted that there is a sample mock-up at the end, and they would love to know the date that goes with the cover postcard.

Chair Bocko stated that there are some visuals, but he is gathering that this is more of a description. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that she can read the email:

“Dear Carrah,

Thank you so much for giving me a chance to work on this. I really enjoyed learning the history of the river and the park. I came up with an idea, outlined in the slide deck attached to this email, which uses an illustration of the Ashuelot River to highlight all of the amazing people who have contributed to the park and the region from the Abenaki to today. This section would use some elements of the timeline provided to me, but in a way that I hope would be most engaging and inspiring to visitors.

Before executing the design, I wanted you and the Board to review and approve the idea. If you like it, I will send you an itemized budget to complete the design and production, building in opportunities to review the work at various stages prior to printing. My costs so far are pretty minimal, so I would love to have your feedback before we go further.

*Thanks so much,
Martin”*

ARPAB members and Friends spoke positively about Mr. Royce’s message, his creativity, and his professionalism. Discussion ensued. Friends members spoke about wanting a QR code to a map of cobblestones. Chair Bocko stated that he thinks they should meet with Mr. Royle to respond to his message. He continued that he does not know if it would be too much to ask for them to have a mock-up. He does not see in this what the sign would look like, even just in a general way. Others agreed. Others spoke about how that is the work that Mr. Royle would need to be paid for. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that they can ask him to create a mock-up and present his scope and fees for what he has done so far, including the mock-up. She continued that that would give them a good understanding of what is to come. Others agreed. Discussion continued about Mr. Royle’s ideas. Mr. Haynes stated that he wonders if instead of using artists’ renderings of the river as a timeline, there could be photographs. Others agreed.

Chair Bocko asked if anyone else had thoughts. Ms. Adams stated that as a relatively new volunteer to the park, she noticed that some QR code tags to identify tree or shrub species are either missing or not working. She asked if that has come up. Others replied yes, they are aware of it. Mr. Winsor stated that sometimes the tags get bent as the tree grows, and sometimes squirrels scratch them. He continued that they are trying to come up with a new kind of tag. It is a work in progress. Discussion continued. Mr. Winsor stated that the park’s trees were inventoried last year, and there are or will be new number tags on them, but not with the QR codes. The QR codes will be up to the ARPAB to work on.

Chair Bocko asked Ms. Fisk-Hennessey to review the action plan for the sign. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that she hears that the ARPAB would like to know the date stamp on the postcard on the front of the sample mock-up. She continued that they would like Mr. Royle to create a mock-up or two and provide his scope and fees. They would like to investigate whether the timeline is along the river in an artistic rendering or photos depicting the actual history of the park. They would like to make sure the links are active for the cobblestone map and the arboretum. Chair Bocko stated that to clarify what they are looking for with the mock-up, it does not need to be very detailed. Just a rough model. Others agreed. Chair Bocko stated that this is good progress. He asked if Ms. Fisk-Hennessey will be the one to communicate with Mr. Royle. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied yes.

Raynee Carlson, Friends member, stated that she wants to clarify that the “cobblestone map” they are talking about will not be an actual map, but more of a link to a listing of the cobblestones. Discussion ensued about how it will be an alphabetical, living spreadsheet. Ms. Mathews stated that they might have to do a map so people know what “Section A” means, for example, to locate their stones. Others replied yes, a general map, not a map of each stone.

B. Bird Ecology

6. Recent/Upcoming Events

A. Pollinator Palooza – Saturday, 6/27/26, 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM

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

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that KPRD is excited about these events getting people to the park.

Mr. Winsor stated that the Keene Senior Center asked him to give a tour of the park again, on Wednesday, June 24, at 2:00 PM. He continued that he wanted to make sure there was nothing else scheduled in the park at that time. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that there is nothing else scheduled, so he is good to go. Chair Bocko asked if anyone else had events to share, or anything about the park that people should know.

Ms. Adams stated that when she was working in the park last Friday, she picked up some trash, and could not find a trash can. ARPAB members replied that there is a trash can by the entrance, and one by the pollinator garden. Discussion ensued about the trash can locations. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that KPRD staff can investigate to see if the trash cans are where they are supposed to be. Discussion ensued about the balance of having enough trash cans so that people can find and use them when they need them, versus not having so many trash cans that people misuse them by putting too much/household trash in them, and parks staff cannot keep up with it. Chair Bocko asked Ms. Adams what she suggests. Ms. Adams replied that her opinion is that it would be helpful to have trash cans within 25 to 50 feet of the exits within the park, but they should not have trash cans in the parking lot. They should not be too close to benches, due to potential odor. Discussion continued. ARPAB members and Friends stated that they will look at the trash can situation.

7. New/Other Business

A. Benches and Trolls

Mr. Winsor stated that he was in Rhode Island the other day and took a walk to visit the trolls [Minute Taker note: giant sculptures of trolls]. He continued that he took a photo and sent it to Ms. Fisk-Hennessey. They had talked a bit about the trolls before, about how they would maybe be a nice addition to the Rachel Marshall area and somewhere along the walkway/bikeway. However, they are very expensive – about a quarter of a million dollars each. They are incredible and children are drawn to them. They entice visitors. Ms. Littleton from the Monadnock Conservancy is excited about the trolls, too. Discussion ensued. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that there are strict rules about troll placement, such as ensuring they are not visible from any roadway.

Mr. Winsor stated that regarding benches, he was approached by a friend of the park, who had a friend who passed away and asked him to find out about the policy for putting a bench in the park. She was asking if there would be an appropriate place by the river for a granite bench to honor her friend. He asked Ms. Fisk-Hennessey if there is a policy about this. If there is not, they should create a policy, so they do not end up with too many benches or ones with inappropriate materials that degrade over time, for example.

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that the City does have a policy on bench donations. She continued that the bench donation program runs through Mr. Anderson. A year and a half ago, Ms. Fisk-Hennessey and Mr. Anderson toured all the City parks to identify which locations would be appropriate for benches. Ashuelot River Park is not one of those parks, because they do not want the park to feel cluttered or “too full.” They want it to stay as natural as possible. There are opportunities for benches at Ladies’ Wildwood Park, Robin Hood Park, and other locations throughout the city. She will print out the bench donation form for the next ARPAB meeting so everyone can see it.

Ms. Mathews suggested a spot in Ashuelot River Park she thinks a bench would work in, to provide symmetry under the pergola. Ms. Carlson asked about the granite benches by the park, and whether they could get signage to put on them. Discussion ensued about that or engraving. Ms. Casey asked if there is an update on the Cage sculpture. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey replied that it is there as an artist-sponsored placement, and the artist hopes to sell it. In response to a question, she clarified that the City will not be buying it; it is on loan. Discussion continued.

B. Future Agenda Items

Chair Bocko stated that for the next ARPAB meeting agenda, they wanted to invite the City Engineer back for an update on the dam. He continued that the permanent sign project is another agenda item. They would also like to invite the Antioch intern, even if it is just to introduce himself. He does not think the intern will be ready with information to share yet.

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that she and Chair Bocko meet the week before ARPAB meetings to make sure they are all set and ready to go. She continued that if anyone has items they would like to see on the agenda, she encourages them to reach out to her and/or Chair Bocko. Chair Bocko agreed and stated that people should not hesitate to reach out. There are many standing agenda items, but there is always room for items people want to add.

8. Adjourn – Next Meeting Scheduled for Tuesday, July 14, 2026

There being no further business, Chair Bocko adjourned the meeting at 9:19 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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