

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, June 15, 2026

4:30 PM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Gary Flaherty, Chair
Barbara Richter, Vice Chair
Councilor Michele Chalice
Steven Bill
Ken Bergman
Bob Milliken, Alternate (Voting)
Thomas Haynes, Alternate (Arrived at 4:32 PM)
John Therriault, Alternate (Voting)

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner
Andy Bohannon, Deputy City Manager (left early)

Members Not Present:

William White
Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Alternate

1. Call to Order

Chair Flaherty called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM.

Connor Corey of Keene was present.

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes – May 18, 2026 & May 19, 2026

May 18, 2026 minutes revisions: Line 75, replace “the buffer following the wetland” with “impact to the wetland buffer.” Line 210, indicate it was the property adjacent to the vernal pools, not the property with the vernal pools. Line 159, replace “rough” with “roof.” Line 233, add “original” before “North Trailhead.” Line 252, change “the group” to “New England Mountain Bike Association (NEMBA).”

May 19, 2026 minutes revisions: Line 124 replace “City Flaherty” with “Chair Flaherty.” Line 168, replace “seldom” with “observed.”

A motion by Mr. Bergman to adopt the May 18 and May 19, 2026 meeting minutes, as amended, was duly seconded by Vice Chair Richter. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Corey asked what the meeting is about and Chair Flaherty said the Commission focuses on things like wetlands and swamps.

3. Planning Board Referral

- a. PB-26-15 - Major Site Plan & Surface Water CUP - Eversource L163 Transmission Line - Applicant Normandeau Associates Inc., on behalf of owner Public Service Company of New Hampshire (d/b/a Eversource Energy), proposes to replace five existing utility structures along the L163 Transmission Line. The proposed work area begins at the southern entrance to the Old Gilsum Road trail along Timberlane Drive and will continue for ~1-mile to the north. A Surface Water Protection Conditional Use Permit is requested for ~3,487-sf of impact within the 75-ft surface water buffer to allow for the installation of timber matting and a temporary gravel access road.**

Bill McCloy was present representing Normandeau Associates Inc., who prepared and worked with Eversource on the Conditional Use Permit application and did the natural resources work and mapping within the project area. Mr. McCloy did not have anything new to add and welcomed questions. Chair Flaherty asked for a recap of the project. Mr. McCloy said this project is the proposed replacement of five utility structures on the L163 utility line located on Old Gilsum Road. These are wooden structures that have deteriorated over 40 or 50 years, and they have been inspected and determined that they need to be replaced. The proposed project would replace them in kind with steel structures. Eversource has done a few other projects over the last few years, and this is another version of the same thing. He said the project does cross one delineated wetland within the right-of-way. So, because it will cross through the wetland and through the 75-foot Surface Water Protection Overlay District buffer, they submitted the application. There are three types of proposed impacts within either the wetland or the buffer. He explained the Old Gilsum Road is a Class VI Road that crosses through the utility right-of-way (ROW) and the wetland currently. He explained that the project is largely proposing to use Old Gilsum Road as it is because there are existing roads within the transmission line ROW that were also proposed to be used and some of those are within the buffer, where the wetland is to be crossed. The applicant proposed to use timber matting for the construction equipment in the wet areas. Due to the configuration of the existing trails and access roads that are out there, Eversource is proposing to construct a temporary stretch of access road within the buffer for use during construction. The area would then be restored following construction, seeded, stabilized, and allowed to return to certain existing conditions, which is the mowed utility right of way.

Chair Flaherty asked how much disturbance there would be in the wetland buffer. Mr. McCloy said the proposed disturbance to the buffer is approximately 1,930 square feet. The Chair asked if that would be repaired after construction and Mr. McCloy said yes. Chair Flaherty asked if they would be using any particular seed mixes if there is bare ground. Mr. McCloy said the contractors plan to use an upland restoration mix that they use on just about all their projects because this is an upland buffer, so they would not just use a wetland mix there.

Mr. Haynes asked about where the timber mats would be placed and protrude into the wetland. Mr. McCloy showed where they would be used on the map. They would extend from the roadway into the wetland but not to where it is pooled; existing vernal pools would be avoided. Mr. Haynes asked about the proposed roadway that would be used and Mr. McCloy said the issue is that Eversource could not maneuver their equipment on the existing road because it is too sharp of a corner, so they need another road. When putting the timber mats on Old Gilsum Road,

Mr. Haynes asked if they would be graded so bikers and walkers can get over them comfortably. Mr. McCloy said that in the upland areas outside the wetland they usually add a little stone transition, so it is somewhat smooth enough to drive over and up onto them. Chair Flaherty called it like an “apron.” Mr. Bill asked if Old Gilsum Road would remain open to the public during the project for recreation and Mr. McCloy said yes, there would be close coordination with the Recreation Department regarding all the trails in the area. Jeremy Fennell of Eversource Energy said the only situation in which the public would have to be delayed, per se, is when the slower moving construction equipment is taken up Old Gilsum Road but that would only happen a couple of times. Mr. Bill said he was up on Old Gilsum Road not long ago and noticed geofabric under parts of it from where parts of the road were washed away. He asked if that would be disturbed by the construction equipment. Mr. McCloy said their job is to use the road as is and not to improve it; the Public Works Department does not want it improved.

Deputy City Manager, Andy Bohannon, recalled the petitioner being good partners with the City on a recent project. Mr. Bohannon said the City does not want the road improved to the level that vehicles would use (i.e., just nearly able) but he said the significant size of the equipment would create some rutting. So, some years ago, rip rap was placed along Old Gilsum Road to prevent a lot of the erosion. He thought that may need a bit of restoration after this to help with erosion. He cited significant issues with another site at Goose Pond from a logging company. He called what happened with Eversource the last time a good compromise to stabilize the road in the future. He thought it had held up well for the five or six years since, to Mr. Bill’s point, and did not think it was at a significant cost. Mr. Bill said it may not fare well with heavy equipment over it and that stream goes into Goose Pond, so he cited concern for any impact.

Continuing past the power line, Mr. Bill thought there was a cellar hole. Mr. Haynes thought he was thinking of a different spot. Mr. Bill asked the petitioner to talk about the disturbance to the stone wall. Mr. McCloy replied that there may not be. The stone wall is called out on the plans located near one of the structures that is to be replaced, and the City Engineer commented that if it needs to be moved for construction, it would have to be surveyed and put back under the direction of a licensed surveyor. Mr. McCloy said it may not need to be removed. He said the other option would be for Eversource to protect the wall with timber mats. Mr. Fennell added that he thinks the wall is a property boundary, so there was no intent to dismantle it at this time.

Councilor Chalice was unclear whether the process Mr. Bohannon described (i.e., rip rap for erosion mitigation) was being proposed or if the Commission could propose it. Mr. McCloy said the same thing was mentioned during his pre-application meeting with the Public Works Department. Councilor Chalice asked if it was in the plan. Mr. McCloy said not specifically. Councilor Chalice asked for it to be called out specifically and Mr. McCloy said he could consider something. Mr. Fennell said this was a matter of not proposing additional material but ensuring with documentation that nothing is in worse condition after construction. Councilor Chalice recalled the particular materials and sequences Mr. Bohannon mentioned. Mr. Bohannon said prior to the last Eversource project, there was pretty much bare road, so going up with the heavy machinery was going to totally rut it. Thus, graded in after was 3/4-inch to 2-inch stone to prevent the rutting and he said it held up really well; it was sturdy. Chair Flaherty said the stone is usually lined with geomat. Mr. McCloy was on site the date of this meeting and said it looked pretty good: there were some water bars and standard practice is to ensure they are in place

during and after construction. Councilor Chalice wanted to ensure it was all written into the plans. Mr. McCloy said it could absolutely be written into the plans and Conditional Use Permit (CUP). He would be sure to call the contractor's attention to this condition before construction.

Mr. Haynes pointed to a location on the map just into the woods and asked whether the petitioner saw some early steep ruts. Mr. McCloy said he did not. Mr. Haynes said he brought it up because approximately one month prior there were Eversource subcontractors working and painting the bottoms of poles further in on the power lines, and they left pretty deep ruts because it was wet. He was unsure whether that was something that could be tied into the pre-conditions: if bringing gravel for the timber mat aprons, could these ruts be adjusted to make it safer for the machines? Mr. McCloy confirmed on Old Gilsum Road just before the ROW where it is softer.

Mr. Bergman referred to wetland 100 and photos 4 and 5, one of which showed spillover running between the two parts of the wetland across Old Gilsum Road and the other shows what purports to be a potential vernal pool. He asked if it was not a confirmed vernal pool. Mr. McCloy said they performed the delineation in the fall and did not revisit in the spring, so they decided to treat it essentially as a vernal pool. It had been avoided and they were coordinating with New Hampshire Fish and Game, who say that any areas within 50 feet of the vernal pool must be restored to pre-construction conditions. In this case, a lot of that overlaps with the City buffer. Mr. Bergman noted the Commission is curious about the state of documentation or verification of vernal pools in the area. Mr. McCloy expected by looking at it that it probably does have flow through it, but Mr. Bergman said not deeply connected to streams or anything like that. Mr. McCloy agreed. Discussion ensued about the vernal pool location on the map.

Mr. Bill asked about the foundation for the new towers. Mr. McCloy explained that each structure is made up of two poles and there is a crossbar at the top (i.e., an "H"). The location of each vertical pole is drilled with a drill rig, they put a culvert in the hole, they place in the steel pole structure to the correct depth, pack around the structure with stone, and cap it with some finer material. Mr. Bill was trying to get a sense of the degree of disturbance involved. Mr. McCloy said it is fairly minimal. Mr. Fennell said the excavation is only approximately five feet in diameter and an auger is used to drill the holes. Mr. McCloy showed the black squares on the plans around the structures, where there will need to be some leveling to set up the bucket truck, drilling rig, and cranes. Once the project is finished, they restore all of that but leave a 30-foot by 60-foot pad for future access.

Mr. Bergman referred to photo 8, which is a different location than the wetland, and shows two parallel sets of lines. He asked if those were Eversource lines. Mr. Fennell imagined they were distribution lines (i.e., lower voltage) that come off the others at some point. Mr. Bergman asked if this is the line that crosses Court Street from near the Ashuelot River that the Commission reviewed a few years prior. Mr. Fennell thought it was that one, or a part of the A152 line. Mr. Bohannon said this line starts at the new substation in Wheelock Park and goes out to the Ashuelot River, up Court Street, and to Goose Pond. Mr. Bergman said it is the one he was thinking of. Mr. Bohannon agreed they did significant work on that line a few years prior.

Mr. Bill asked when the work season would be. Mr. McCloy said the State of New Hampshire requested that the work occur between the middle of October and middle of April. Eversource would keep the City informed of when work is occurring.

Mr. Bill asked about invasive species. Mr. McCloy said there do not seem to be many in the area today. Generally, the best management practices are that the contractors inspect and sweep all their matting and equipment before they move around, especially if they've been working in areas with invasives. Mr. Bill asked if they would be bringing much material on site for this project and if it would be inspected. Mr. McCloy said there would be some crushed stone at pretty low risk of having seeds in it and they try to use clean stone and matting, equipment structures, etc.

A motion by Mr. Therriault for the Conservation Commission to support Planning Board Referral PB-26-15 was duly seconded by Vice Chair Richter, with the following conditions:

1. To restore the road to pre-construction conditions and to document the current condition of the road prior to the start of construction.
2. To use a pollinator friendly upland seed mix.
3. Invasive species management.

The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Noonan and Mr. Fennell departed.

- 4. Presentation and Discussion: Pat Russell Park Expansion – Deputy City Manager Andy Bohannon will review the plans for the expansion of the Pat Russell Park into the former Findings property, review physical site constraints (e.g., floodplain, floodway, contamination, etc.), and provide an overview of project funding sources.**

Mr. Corey mentioned that he was working on his Scout badge.

The Commission welcomed Deputy City Manager, Andy Bohannon, who first mentioned that the Natural Resource Storage Program would be at the Recreation Center for 9–12 weeks. It is application based, so he encouraged acting early.

Deputy City Manager Bohannon stated that he had received Vice Chair Richter's email the previous Friday and had read and understood her questions. He then provided background on the project funding and site constraints. The City received \$225,000 from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), a federal program administered through the State of New Hampshire, for park improvements. The grant was awarded for the skate park development and required a 50-percent local match. The skate park itself was constructed for approximately \$300,000, with additional funding intended for related site improvements. Mr. Bohannon explained that the City also received a \$117,000 grant for demolition of the former Findings property. When the demolition project was bid, the cost came in at approximately \$240,000, significantly higher than the original estimate. The City worked with the State Parks Bureau to reallocate \$100,000 from the skate park site-work funding, while preserving the funding used for

the skate park itself, to help meet the demolition cost. After the additional funding was identified, the project was rebid and came in below the earlier bid amount.

Mr. Bohannon said the initial environmental review did not identify significant concerns. However, when the former employee parking area near Beaver Brook was removed, more contamination was found than anticipated. Terracon Environmental, which had performed earlier work on the site in 1994, was retained because of its familiarity with the property. After additional testing was requested by the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (DES) in October 2025, the City completed further testing and received the full report in February 2026. Mr. Bohannon explained that the original concept included a parking lot, community space, and related improvements, such as a walkway. When the demolition funding needs changed, the parking lot was initially removed from the plan and replaced with a required walkway connection near the skate park and Pat Russell Park. Later, because DES required the contaminated area to be encapsulated, the City considered relocating the parking lot over that area. He noted that this would place the parking closer to Beaver Brook than originally intended.

Mr. Bohannon said Vice Chair Richter raised concerns about the proposed location, including its proximity to Beaver Brook. In response, the City reviewed ways to reduce the amount of pavement, including removing two or three parking spaces, noting it could not be moved off of the contaminated area. There was a conversation about changing the material, but it is strongly felt it should remain asphalt. The concept was also discussed by the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee, where suggestions included adding a bike lane and bike parking. However, Mr. Bohannon acknowledged that those additions would increase impervious surface. After reviewing Vice Chair Richter's comments, Mr. Bohannon said he believed the City could remove the separate bike lane, use pavement markings and signage within the driveway for bicyclists and pedestrians, and rely on the curved driveway alignment to slow traffic. He said this approach would reduce the paved area. He also discussed potential bicycle amenities, including covered bicycle parking and a repair station. He had explored e-bike charging options, including whether a solar-powered version was available, but said the vendor did not currently offer that option and he did not want to bring conduit into the space. He said they came up with space for a bike shelter and the bike repair; although there is another bike repair station at the end of Eastern Avenue, the kids at the skate park may use it and he thinks it would serve a good purpose there. After exploring Vice Chair Richter's suggestion, the idea is to take away the bike lane and paint within the driveway bike markings with proper signage and have it slightly curved to slow traffic.

Mr. Bohannon said this had been submitted and the City could adjust the amount of pavement included in the project. He said he was interested in working with the neighborhood group, although they had not yet met, and noted that the City could review potential plantings related to the rain gardens. He added that Parks and Recreation Director Carrah Fisk-Hennessey was developing planting plans and suggestions to bring forward for further discussion. Mr. Bohannon also referenced Vice Chair Richter's suggestion about exploring additional restoration opportunities. He explained that when Russell Park was designed, the City did not yet own the former Findings property, so restoration work could not be extended into that area at the time. He described a wet area on the site that remains saturated throughout the year and said the existing restoration area at Russell Park appears to be functioning well. He suggested that a similar

restoration approach, or an extension of the existing restoration area, could be worth exploring with various agencies and potential funding sources. He said he was open to considering those options as the project moves forward.

Mr. Bill said the old contamination goes beyond the proposed parking area to Beaver Brook and asked what the City plans to do with that area: remove soil or seal it? As of right now, Mr. Bohannon said the City would have to work with NH DES related to that. It is a “No Rise Area” (a designated regulatory floodway where rules strictly prohibit any increase in base flood elevations), so nothing can be added; obviously through plantings the bank could be helped. Mr. Bill asked about the contamination and how extensive it is. Mr. Bohannon said it is metal contamination although not through railroad tailings. He said Findings was not an environmentally friendly company, so it was higher end contaminants like nickel that flowed right into the Ashuelot River. He said the City is trying to make it better than now. Mr. Bill said bioremediation seemed to be a way and Mr. Bohannon agreed.

Councilor Chalice was thrilled to hear about some type of overhead structure. She said it is open and will take years to have any sort of shade there with the hot weather these days. She did not see that on the Plan and asked if it had not been modified, and there was an unclear response. Councilor Chalice was also glad to hear there would be a bike trail but no additional pavement for the bikes. She hoped the rain garden would be a part of the wetland and would acknowledge the floodplain and plant community there (i.e., detention/retention vs. garden). Mr. Bohannon thinks the rain gardens are a little different than the pollinator gardens that would be closer to the surrounding parking lot area. He is happy to continue working with the Commission and interested people like Councilor Haas, who was present, on this effort. Mr. Bohannon said fortunately LCFW is not a one-time funding source, so the City can go back at any time in the future and say it needs to add an additional 50% match (the minimum is \$50,000). He said if he had known in December, he probably could have asked for \$125,000 because a lot of communities are not seeking it and the City has been very successful with it.

Vice Chair Richter said she had spoken with Emily Nichols, who administers the Aquatic Resource Mitigation (ARM) Fund for the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services. Ms. Nichols indicated that installing the parking lot would likely reduce the project’s eligibility for ARM funding. Vice Chair Richter explained that the ARM Fund may be more likely to support a broader restoration project that addresses the full streambank and wetland area together, rather than the parking on the streambank. She noted that ARM funding comes from developers who pay mitigation fees when their development projects exceed certain wetland impact thresholds (10,000 sf), and the funds are used for wetland restoration, land conservation, and protection of parcels with water resources. Vice Chair Richter said the ARM Fund could be a potential funding source for this project, but that eligibility would need to be considered before the parking lot is constructed. Mr. Bohannon asked if it has a 50% match and Ms. Richter thought so; she thought you could rank higher with a match but did not think projects were off the table without one. She also explained that funding is per watershed, so when there are impacts to the Ashuelot watershed, the money comes back here. Right now, there is not a lot of money in that fund. There also used to be site specific ARM funding; it used to be that, if someone impacted a specific wetland in the City of Keene, the money would go to the City instead of the state. Vice Chair Richter said that if the City’s “ducks are in a row,” this could be

an ARM-ready project, noting however that the project must be shovel ready before funding can be received.

Mr. Bill wondered about a pavilion with solar collectors on it. It did not seem to him like the parking was that much of an issue. Mr. Bohannon said the parking is an issue because of the capping. Mr. Bill asked if a building could be used as a cap instead and Mr. Bohannon said no, the LWCF funding is contingent upon the parking. When the project was originally designed, there was parking involved and that is what they call the accessibility of the project; if parking is not there, they will take the \$75,000 away. The parking could be bike parking, and he had some unique ideas for that to reduce the footprint based on what Vice Chair Richter had shared. Ms. Brunner added that the area is in the floodway, so structures cannot be constructed, even pavilions (those could be built in the floodplain, with permission).

Mr. Bergman said the purpose of the project is to cap some of the contaminants, but the map showed some contaminants in the embankment. He wondered if those are moving into the stream after heavy rains and if the City is monitoring pollutants downstream in the brook from that. Mr. Bohannon said there are 15 monitoring wells on the site that are tested actively every April but that does not include the brook itself. Chair Flaherty said a lot of the plans on this are to let it slowly leech out, so it contaminates little-by-little.

Mr. Therriault assumed the parking would be handicap accessible and Mr. Bohannon said yes. Mr. Therriault asked about the pollinator area, which did not appear to be designed on this plan and asked if they could start building that pollinator area this year. Mr. Bohannon said that was more of a question for the Director of Parks and Recreation, who would be leading it.

As a member of the East Keene Group, Councilor Chalice said that if they had not invited Mr. Bohannon to speak about this yet, she was asking now. Mr. Bohannon said he was happy to attend any time.

Vice Chair Richter asked about the bike path that looked like it was expanding and Mr. Bohannon agreed. Vice Chair Richter also referred to a grey area on the map, which Mr. Bohannon said was going away. Vice Chair Richter thought it would be nice to keep the connecting 5-foot walking path in the plan and Mr. Bohannon said it is required.

Councilor Ed Haas of Keene heard Mr. Bill ask about bioremediation and Mr. Bohannon had replied in the affirmative. Mr. Bohannon did not recall saying that. Discussion ensued about the meaning of bioremediation and what would be happening in the southwestern corner and on the bank. Ms. Brunner's understanding of bioremediation was that the plants grow and need to be manually cut and placed into hazardous waste. She did not think that was what the City was planning vs. plantings to help stabilize the bank and prevent erosion. Mr. Bohannon said anything but Japanese knotweed and briefly explained a situation at Pat Russell Park, in which the City had to maintain the stream banks for five years, free of knotweed per New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (DES). It was virtually impossible because it had to occur manually. He said the City would work within any New Hampshire DES guidelines. Councilor Chalice said it would be great to hear New Hampshire DES' newest recommendations because

pulling knotweed is not the newest recommendation. Discussion ensued about the great job the City did at Ladies Wildwood Park with the spraying of knotweed.

Councilor Chalice said it sounded like there were still conversations to be had about what bioremediation or plantings in the area would be helpful. Mr. Bohannon said that was correct. Chair Flaherty did not want to use the term bioremediation, which implies someone must manually cut and take it to hazardous waste. Discussion continued.

Councilor Haas asked if there was no way of reconsidering the entire concept and having a better environment and stream overall, despite losing funding. He said it sounded like that was being rejected out of hand. Mr. Bohannon said to answer that question very directly, this Conservation Commission has no authority over this project. The City moved forward with the design that it thought was going to be good and are going to adjust it as needed.

Vice Chair Richter asked why this did not fall under a Conditional Use Permit, where the Conservation Commission would have purview for comment on the bank. Ms. Brunner said this is governmental land use and they do not have to go through the same process. Vice Chair Richter said they do not have to, but it would be nice if the City followed their own rules. If it had, she said the Commission would have had a chance to comment before it even went to City Council. Mr. Bohannon said he heard the Vice Chair and referred to the unfortunate timing of everything that occurred with responding to DES and getting the proper responses, as he laid out in the timeline, which he recapped. He only had between the October 31 letter that more testing was due and the December 9 grant deadline to act. Before that would have been four years ago, when he presented the original design to the Planning Board and there was no wetland buffer impact at that time; they moved the parking lot once they found out where the contamination was. Mr. Bill asked if the Planning Board would refer something like that to the Commission if they were so inclined. Ms. Brunner said only if it is written into the Planning Board's regulations that it goes to the Conservation Commission. The Planning Board does not send things to the Conservation Commission ad hoc because they want to treat everyone fairly. So, earth excavation and surface water Conditional Use Permits come to the Conservation Commission. In all fairness, Mr. Bohannon said that if the City had the opportunity to not put this in this location, it would not be there. Unfortunately, because of the contaminants, the City needs to solve the problem.

Councilor Chalice wondered whether it was possible to request an entire study of the Beaver Brook area, with recommendations, if further projects in the future come that are going to impact the brook right-of-way. Then, she asked if those projects could be required to come before the Conservation Commission before those decisions are made in the future and similar tight timelines are faced. Mr. Bohannon said sometimes there is more community engagement in some projects, and in this process the engagement was focused on the skaters at the skate park, not necessarily the rest of the park. He said losing the funding for the Findings demolition changed everything. Councilor Chalice stated that the East Keene Group is not in favor of any of the parking.

5. Report-outs:

a. Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Subcommittee

Mr. Haynes said the spillway bridge dedication was on June 6, 2026 with about 20 people. It was a nice event that felt really good. The Subcommittee had a working meeting on Friday, June 12 and did trail work.

b. Invasive Plant Species

Mr. Milliken reported that he pulled about 130 wild parsnips at Elm and Court Streets, as well as some garlic mustard. There is still some more at this location, but he is just monitoring it. He said the area has everything from Japanese knotweed to multiflora rose, bittersweet, and burning bush. Mr. Milliken said the scary part is the water there runs down into the Ashuelot Swamp, so if any of those seeds flow that way, it is a problem. He had plans to meet with City Planner, Megan Fortson, the next week because the City's Energy and Climate Committee is interested in contributing to this effort.

Upcoming invasive pull dates were June 25, 26, 29, and 30. June 25 at Robin Hood Park and June 26 at the North Arch Bridge. He would send details for the other two dates. Events are at the end of the day for more volunteers. The City's Communications team would do press releases. Mr. Milliken needed to coordinate with Councilor Williams because he had started working some of the past sites again this year.

Mr. Milliken also joined the iMapInvasives free application. It lets him take clear pictures of where he is, the location, and it maps it out well for him. He said he would try it. He likes it because it creates a map for him vs. iNaturalist. He was curious whether the maps could be shared with others; he believed he could build a group that others could join. Others agreed that it is exciting.

c. Land Conservation / Easement Monitoring

Vice Chair Richter had not performed easement monitoring but drove by some properties and saw no glaring concerns.

In the meantime, Vice Chair Richter said she finished the Conservation Priority Checklist and reworked it based on the Land Protection Criteria from the last workshop, so they would better reflect each other. Councilor Chalice called it exciting. Vice Chair Richter said it should help the Commission go through the priorities they want to discussion for land purchases.

Councilor Chalice said something like this would have been very helpful when presenting two parcels to Council recently to communicate why to buy the pieces of land; she said it was very uncomfortable. She said they did not have that piece to be able to tell them. In the future, Ms. Brunner said she would try to ensure Mr. Bohannon is there for those things because he is really helpful. Discussion ensued briefly about how the City's mapping integrates with GRANITView. All agreed this checklist would be very helpful in the future. Councilor Chalice was surprised that fewer Councilors were on the Commission's side of the purchase.

Councilor Chalice noted that two Councilors were incessant that there should be an appraisal on the land. She asked if there are normally appraisals on land the Commission recommends buying. Ms. Brunner said no, not in her experience. Discussion ensued. Councilor Chalice noted the state had just passed the legislation last year about development on Class VI roads and discussion continued about how the property owner knew that. Ms. Brunner said the new law goes into effect July 1, 2026 with some caveats: the City has to approve a building permit if the property owner signs a waiver and has it recorded with the registry of deeds, but they also have to prove that it is insurable. Councilor Chalice said that was the information the Realtor City Councilor was talking about and she reiterated and it was an uncomfortable conversation. Vice Chair Richter wished she could have been there because it is easy to pull up a lot of the basics. Everyone agreed they know how they want to move forward. Councilor Chalice said it was heartening that there were three or four Councilors who stepped in to provide some background and support.

Ms. Brunner provided an update on the purchase. There was a non-public session during the June 4, 2026 City Council meeting. Ms. Brunner was not present, but Chair Flaherty and Community Development Director Paul Andrus were. Ms. Brunner sent a memo with maps attached for the Councilors, but it was not given to them until the moment, so it was a lot of information to look through. In the end, she said the purchase did pass the City Council. Ms. Brunner said the City Manager did some negotiating. The person who was selling the properties was hoping the City would purchase them to keep them away from development. However, the City Manager pushed back a little because the asking price was based on the assumption that the properties could be developed, and staff thought the chances of development were low. As a result, the City paid less than the asking price. Ms. Brunner said she hoped City Council would be happy with that, although she did not know whether the update had been reported back to them yet. Discussion continued about whether it may be worth the Commission using the Conservation Land Acquisition Fund to pay for appraisals in the future, even if they are expensive. Ms. Brunner said an appraisal would not have been appropriate in this case because it would have been looking at the market value, which would be changing with the new law. Councilor Chalice knows there is real sensitivity and frustration on the Council right now because of property taxes and the downtown work. So, the Chair said it is hard for the Council to hear about spending money.

Discussion ensued about the references to GRANITView on the Checklist. Vice Chair Richter said that Commissioners could send questions and suggestions for the Checklist to Ms. Brunner and they could review them at the next meeting.

Mr. Haynes noted that in the past, the Commission went through this Checklist sort of process without an appraisal. He was not saying it could not change, but it had not been the process. Councilor Chalice said she understood but had a feeling it could be different in the future. Vice Chair Richter said it is best practice for land trusts to get appraisals whereas towns can be different, but the Commission should be prepared to have one if necessary to safeguard public perception that it is not overpaying. Mr. Haynes said the City Manager had always negotiated in the past. Mr. Bill also commented on the Commission's limited annual Budget. Chair Flaherty said it is an option.

Mr. Milliken asked if it is possible to put invasive species on GRANITView and Councilor Chalice knew she could for her clients but said that it is broad and not fine-grained.

d. Pollinator Updates

Councilor Chalice passed around information about the upcoming Pollinator Palooza. She said she had grown a bunch of common milkweed, which were still tiny babies. At the event, the kids would help tease out the plants with some water and a tub, then plant each one into a little cup with holes in the bottom. Their parents would receive a handout based on materials she had pulled together for workshops at 100 Church Street, which were intended to raise awareness about milkweed. Councilor Chalice said people hear about milkweed, but it is not always the most attractive plant. The handout provides additional information, as well as cautions because milkweed is a poisonous plant, while also explaining that it has all kinds of benefits. She planned to have the handouts printed two per sheet for parents, and said the Pollinator Palooza would be held Saturday, June 27, from 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM.

Mr. Therriault said he sent Ms. Brunner a picture by email. He explained that on May 29, he collected a swarm in downtown Keene from the old church across the street from the fire station. The swarm was located high up near the beginning of the steeple, and it took about four hours to collect. He said he brought it back home, and it is now living in his backyard and marginally managed lands. He added that the interesting part is that the mother colony is actually at the back of that building. He had asked the City if he could use the City's bucket truck to gain access to the colony and trap it out so it would not end up throwing another swarm next year. Mr. Therriault said the request was routed to Public Works, and Public Works said no. As a result, they missed the eight-day window. He explained that once a swarm issues, the hive is absolutely queen-less for eight days, and if it can be trapped out during that eight-day window, it is 100 percent successful. After that eight-day window, it is no longer 100 percent successful and becomes a three-month evolution. He said they were not able to do it, so next year another swarm would likely come from that hive, and somebody would have to catch it. He said it would have been nice if the bucket truck could have been used, and he did not understand why that was not possible. Councilor Chalice thought there could have been all kinds of legal issues for the City, to their defense. Discussion ensued about who owned the old church. Mr. Therriault mentioned the hive is inaccessible from the inside because it is trapped between two brick walls.

6. Discussion Items

a. Land Protection Criteria amended May 2026

Ms. Brunner asked whether the amended Land Protection Criteria needed to be adopted by City Council, and the answer was no. She explained that the City Attorney strongly recommended that nothing in the document put a requirement on the City Council. She said that was one of the items that came out of the May 19 workshop. Some wording changes had been made, and there was a redline version for the Commission to review. She noted changes in the top paragraph. She said the changes were mostly about making the wording more active, reordering some language, and phrasing the criteria in the same way as the other listed items.

Ms. Brunner said most of the discussion had focused on wording at the end of the document. She said the City Attorney advised that the end language should not have any references to the City Council unless the Conservation Commission wants the document adopted by the City Council. One remaining problematic statement was: “The *City* will consider on a case-by-case basis who will bear any costs associated with preparing a proposal for land protection.” Discussion ensued and the Commission revised it to read: “The Conservation Commission will advise on a case-by-case basis who will bear any costs associated with preparing a proposal for land protection.” The other passage that needed revising was: “The Conservation Commission’s recommendation to *City Council* shall include a description of the natural resources and how the property meets the criteria in this checklist.” Discussion ensued and the Commission revised it to be: “The Conservation Commission’s recommendation shall include a written description of the natural resources and how the property meets the criteria in this checklist.” Discussion ensued briefly about whether these items can be provided to Councilors in advance of non-public sessions in their mailboxes and Councilor Chalice said she would inquire further.

Mr. Bergman recalled the Commission talking about the advisability of making certain that purchase contracts should explicitly note that the property was purchased for conservation purposes. He wondered if that should be included on this document in some way. Vice Chair Richter said it is always good to mention that funds are being used to purchase conservation land and that can go in the deed restriction when the parcel is transferred at the time of purchase. Some say that devalues it, but it is important to include. Ms. Brunner said this document is the criteria that the Commission uses to decide whether or not to make purchases. She thought Mr. Bergman was talking about more of an internal checklist for staff, which would be very helpful. Councilor Chalice suggested putting that on next month’s agenda (or after).

Ms. Brunner confirmed the City Attorney had not reviewed the document in depth but made comments. Mr. Haynes asked if she needed to review it before the next meeting, before the Commission adopts the Criteria. Ms. Brunner did not think that it was necessary for the City Attorney to review the criteria before the Commission adopted them.

A motion by Chair Flaherty to adopt the redlined changes to the Land Protection Criteria made at the June 15, 2026 Commission meeting was duly seconded by Councilor Chalice. The motion carried unanimously.

b. 2026 Commission Budget

i) Donation request from Society for the Protection of NH Forests

Ms. Brunner provided a handout listing all expenses to date during the fiscal year. The original allocation was \$2,000. Expenses to date included:

- \$150 donation to the Monadnock-Wantastiquet Trail Coalition
- \$60 New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commission Conference fee
- Bee City USA Sign (\$150)
- New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commission annual dues (\$950)
- Bee City USA annual renewal (\$200)
- Donation to the Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee (\$125)

Pending expenses on the agenda included:

- A request from the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests
- A request from Mr. Milliken for two boxes of Husky Contractor Bags at \$25/box
- A request from Councilor Chalice for seeds: two pounds of New England conservation wildlife mix and two pounds of New England erosion control restoration mix for detention basins and moist sites, those are expensive at \$43.50 per pound and \$39 per pound, respectively, plus shipping at \$15/lb.

Ms. Brunner said that meeting both of Mr. Milliken's requests would leave \$75 for the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests. Mr. Haynes suggested donating \$100 to them. Mr. Milliken offered to only buy one box of bags to compensate. Ms. Brunner confirmed that math would work out with \$100.03 remaining for the Forest Society.

Discussion ensued briefly about the amount of sand Mr. Milliken would need to mix with the seeds. It was noted that the City's sand has salt mixed with it.

The following motion by Mr. Bill was duly seconded by Mr. Therriault. On a vote of 8-0, the Conservation Commission unanimously donated \$100 to the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests.

The following motion by Vice Chair Richter was duly seconded by Mr. Bill. On a vote of 8-0, the Conservation Commission unanimously spent \$24.97 on one box of cleanup bags.

The following motion by Councilor Chalice was duly seconded by Mr. Therriault. On a vote of 8-0, the Conservation Commission unanimously spent \$43.50 on two pounds of New England Conservation Wildlife Mix seeds for a maximum of \$87.00.

The following motion by Vice Chair Richter was duly seconded by Councilor Chalice. On a vote of 8-0, the Conservation Commission unanimously spent \$39.00 on two pounds of New England Control Restoration Mix for Moist Sites for a maximum of \$78.00.

c. Request for Letter of Support re: Neonic Regulations in NH

Councilor Chalice explained that a very brave legislator at the state level tried to pass a law restricting the use of neonicotinoid pesticides in order to protect pollinators. It did not pass, which she said was not surprising. However, she said there was a move to have it handled on a statewide basis through the New Hampshire Division of Pesticide Control. The restrictions could prohibit the use of neonicotinoids pesticides for landscaping, lawns, turf, or ornamental gardens, except to control some invasive species. She requested the Commission's support to prepare a letter of support for their review. Mr. Therriault asked if it was not a little late in the season. Councilor Chalice said this was just in the paper this week and she did not know where it was at in the process. Mr. Therriault meant the timing of the legislature. Councilor Chalice said this was about the rules for the New Hampshire Division of Pesticide Control, not legislation. Councilor Chalice said the letter would be very broad. Chair Flaherty said it could be on the next agenda.

Mr. Bergman understood that sometimes the pesticide is distributed as a coating for seeds. Councilor Chalice said this has nothing to do with agricultural uses. Mr. Bergman also heard that it does not affect mammals that much but can affect birds strongly, so he said Councilor Chalice might want to look into that. She said that would be a part of the argument.

Ms. Brunner noted that she reached out to the City Attorney because this would be the first time the Conservation Commission would be sending a letter of support or opposition to the state level. The City Attorney thinks this would need to go through City Council, although in some situations the Commission can directly advise state agencies. So, this would be sent through City Council in this instance. Councilor Chalice was fine with it but concerned about the timing of the lengthy City Council process. Ms. Brunner was unsure it was strictly required. Discussion ensued about who the letter would be from, i.e., the City or the Commission, and the distinction. Mr. Haynes thought that came up in the far past when trying to send letters. Councilor Chalice thought the Commission could try it, see, and they could always say no. Chair Flaherty suggested writing the letter. Ms. Brunner said the advice was to send it to City Council, if willing. Councilor Chalice said to send it to the Mayor, who would decide what to do with it.

7. New or Other Business

Mr. Bill wanted to make sure in the grand scheme of things that the City is conserving as much as it is developing. He was unsure of the balance right now. He thought of the project approved on Court Street where they essentially bulldozed the trees and whole site, which he did not really get in the original plan. He had some concerns that he thinks in the future should be conditions on some of these plans. For example, wiping out all that soil takes hundreds of thousands of years to redevelop. The Chair said they added several feet of fill toward Court Street. Discussion ensued about the site and comparable sites.

Vice Chair Richter suggested that the Commission could review the City's Conservation Subdivision Ordinance and provide comments. Ms. Brunner said the Court Street project was not a Conservation Subdivision, which can only happen in Low Density, Rural, and Agricultural Zones. Low Density is required to have City water and sewer, so she said for a developer, it is much easier to use the Cottage Court Ordinance, which does not have any sort of set aside requirement; it does have a certain amount of land area that must remain pervious and green space based on the underlying zoning district. Mr. Haynes said that does not inhibit clearing land. Discussion ensued about how the trail at the back of the Court Street property was gone and the Commission had hoped it would remain.

Mr. Bergman mentioned Keene State College becoming so fed up with developer operations that they developed the arboretum and brought in Bartlett Tree for the appraised values of large trees on campus. Then, developers were required to protect as much ground around those trees as possible and minimize trimming.

Discussion continued about how the Commission thought it specifically had a stipulation that the Court Street applicant keep the trail. Ms. Brunner said she could ask what the plan is for that but thought that the developer would need to restore the trail at some point to comply with their site plan. Mr. Bill asked if they would have to come back for further plans. Ms. Brunner said yes, the

plan had been to only clear phase one and then only clear phase two and three at later dates, but in talking to the logging company, they said it would be hard to access phases two and three once phase one was developed. So, they did it all at once. Ms. Brunner confirmed that the trail was on their property; it was an old road with a very old stone wall, which Mr. Milliken said was not impacted, but all the big trees are gone. Mr. Haynes suggested contacting the developer and asking the plan for that area since it was a part of the initial plans to keep the trail. Ms. Brunner agreed and felt fairly confident they would restore it because the developer was initially excited about the trail. Mr. Haynes said to go as far as saying that recreation activities are being interrupted. Ms. Brunner also noted that the Historical Society is planning to recreate the route that 300 militia from Keene took to the Battle of Bennington to celebrate the 250th anniversary of that battle, which goes along this trail. Discussion continued about the trail.

Mr. Bill said his overall concern is about the amount of conservation the City is doing. Councilor Chalice said there is huge consternation among several Councilors about the amount of public land the City currently holds because they are not paying taxes. Vice Chair Richter said there is a report on www.nhacc.com about the economic benefits of natural areas that she could send directly to the Council and Ms. Brunner. Mr. Haynes added that a few years prior, Mr. Bohannon had an economic study from the University of New Hampshire Extension Service that helped document some of the economic benefits of Goose Pond.

Ms. Brunner said it sounded like Mr. Bill's concern was about the entirety of a parcel being developed in certain situations. Being an advisory body to the Planning Board, she said the Commission could consider if there is a certain parcel size above which a minimum of the land has to go into conservation (i.e., mimicking Conservation Subdivision). She was unsure what appetite there would be on the City Council, noting the housing crisis. Councilor Chalice called it a good suggestion. Ms. Brunner suggested lots above five acres at least 20% in natural area, for example. The Commission agreed on the value of natural areas for people who live there and studies on the value of shade.

8. Next Meeting: Monday, July 20 (City Hall)

9. Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Flaherty adjourned the meeting at 6:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katrnya Kibler, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner