ADOPTED

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Monday, October 19, 2026 **4:30 PM** **Room 22, Recreation Center**

Members Present:
Gary Flaherty, Chair
Barbara Richter, Vice Chair
Councilor Michele Chalice
Steven Bill
Ken Bergman (arrived 4:34 PM)
Thomas Haynes, Alternate
John Therriault, Alternate

Staff Present:
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner

Members Not Present:
William White
Bob Milliken, Alternate

1. Call to Order

Chair Flaherty called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM and a roll call was taken.

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes – September 21, 2026

Steve Bill offered the following correction:
Page 47 should be corrected to read as Saturday October 24th instead of the 23rd.

A motion was made by Michele Chalice to accept the September 21 meeting minutes as amended. The motion was seconded by Barbara Richter and was unanimously approved.

3. Report-outs:

a) Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Subcommittee

Mr. Haynes addressed this item and stated since the last meeting there were a couple of work sessions. Signage has been installed. He referred to a hunter's tree stand that was located and cleaned up. There is another walk scheduled for the 24th with Steven Bill and a work crew would construct a short bridge in the water tower area at a later time. Maintenance will also be completed on the access trail that goes around the water tower to the Old Gilsum Road.

b) Invasive Plant Species

Ms. Brunner addressed this item on behalf of Bob Milliken.

The report indicates as follows: Mr. Milliken surveyed the land next to Willow Brook Homes through to Bent Court on September 23, 2026. Many different species of invasive plants were discovered: Knotweed, Multiflora Rose, Buckthorn, Burning bush, Japanese Barberry as well as three Red Pines that showed signs of disease. The Knotweed runs along the brook from the bend near Willow Brook past Bent Court. The thickest patch is right on the bend of the Willow Brook homes. The patch is about eight feet tall, twenty feet wide and almost 100 yards long. The Knotweed is now in the sand islands and is coming up on the lawns.

The property owners noted the fields used to be mowed but have grown over in the past 15 years since the mowing stopped. The property owners indicated they would remove what they can starting next June; it is too large of a growth to do anything this season. Mr. Milliken had suggested they let it die off this winter and make a plan to start in June. If the City could help with mowing, it may help maintain the area. A tarp can be placed on the area and non-chemical methods could also be used to remove the plant.

Last week, Mr. Milliken, Bobby Williams and Mari Brunner pulled out a patch of Knotweed along Beaver Brook and the Woodlawn Cemetery. They also dug out the plants and cut the stalks off the roots then bagged the roots for removal. This is the area Bobby Williams has been maintaining for a few years. Wildflower seeds were spread in this area to encourage native plants to grow.

On October 15 at Robin Hood Park, with help from a volunteer from the City of Keene Water Treatment Department, they worked near the brook close to the gazebo. This spring the group pulled out small plants and this fall dug out the roots. They also planted mixed seeds of native wildflowers and grass.

Mr. Milliken also noted he found two large Bittersweet vines on two trees near the rest rooms/play area. The two trees are almost dead. He also found Multiflora Rose and Buckthorn on the same fence.

Mr. Bergman stated Keene State College has a large area of Japanese Knotweed at its athletic complex near the river. There are also many burning bush plants (Euonymus alatus) on upper Court Street in front of Cheshire Medical Center. He wasn't sure if the City should issue a suggestion to these two entities about what exists on their property.

Mr. Haynes asked how someone should deal with Bittersweet vines on a tree, Ms. Chalice recommended getting a buckhorn blaster online and treating the outside edge of that remaining stem with a chemical; she added now would be time to address this issue.

Ms. Chalice suggested creating a formal letter notifying property owners of invasive species on their property. Ms. Richter felt it would be good to let these property owners know should they plan on doing any more landscaping on their properties.

Ms. Brunner stated Cheshire Medical is aware – the city prohibits any plants that are listed on the invasive species list for new projects.

c) Land Conservation / Easement Monitoring

Ms. Richter stated she did not have anything to report at this time. She stated she did a walk by and drive by of the two properties that have the conservation easements but has not contacted the landowners yet and noted she will have a report completed soon.

d) Pollinator Updates
e) Homegrown National Parks – Discussion About Next Steps

Ms. Chalice stated she had discussed with Homegrown National Parks about a community challenge. However, it requires digital registration, and she would like it to be more face to face. What she is proposing is a series of workshops with a goal of identifying potential partners such as the Conservation Commission, the Cheshire County Conservation District, etc. Ms. Chalice stated she has also reached out to the Caterpillar Lab, who already have an extensive relationship with Homegrown National Park and is hopeful the Lab will agree to schedule the two workshops at their new location.

Ms. Chalice stated she also reached out to the Director at Keene Public Library who is willing to host these workshops as well (as a backup). She suggested a winter seed sowing in November or December, followed with the seedling swap and transplanting workshop in late spring. Then she will schedule a planting event for the summer. The goal is to have this be low cost, for all ages giving people the opportunity to talk to each other.

Ms. Chalice stated she has seeds, five-gallon buckets and native plants she can share.

Mr. Bergman stated he had looked at the biodiversity map and noticed 43 Arch Street, which he clarified is Keene High School. Ms. Chalice stated the question is how many sites does Keene have already. She indicated her business and the Caterpillar Lab are already listed on the map

Chair Flaherty stated the Commission needs to be budget conscious as well. Ms. Chalice agreed and added they would need money for soil and flyers. The Chair noted the City has a compost pile at the transfer station. Ms. Chalice stated that compost pile has some limitations because of what people are adding to the pile and the City now has a sign cautioning users. Mr. Bergman referred to the site at Edgewood and suggested a sign to connect it to Homegrown National Park.

Ms. Richter asked whether Ms. Chalice has a site for 2027 in mind. Ms. Chalice stated she has not reached out to the Parks and Recreation Director yet but did copy her on a recent email sent to Commission members. The Director is in support of this initiative. Ms. Richter suggested different locations each year.

Ms. Brunner asked Ms. Chalice whether this Commission should be making any recommendations to Council. Ms. Chalice felt it would be good if this Commission decided if

they would like to be a partner for this endeavor, which would allow for the City to publish the event on social media.

A motion was made by Barbara Richter that the Conservation Commission supports the Monadnock "Get on the Map" Challenge as a partner. The motion was seconded by John Therriault and was unanimously approved

4. Discussion Items

a) List of Native and Pollinator-Friendly Tree species – Discussion About Next Steps

Ms. Chalice stated there have been some recent presentations during the natural resources class. The recent one was conducted by a representative from Keene State College and a representative from Public Works. She stated they made a good case for using non-native ornamental plants in the downtown. However, there was a request for a separate list for public properties.

Ms. Brunner stated on the planning side, they have received requests from applicants for a list of species that is acceptable and felt this list could be combined with what is being requested for public land. She added that the Planning Board regulations prohibit anything on the invasive species list and encourage native plants.

Ms. Chalice stated that the trees installed as part of the Downtown Infrastructure Project are going to be planted in permeable ("soil cell") containers to help with water evaporation. This type of watering system would be helpful during drought periods.

b) Updates on Airport Wildlife Fence Project

Mr. Bergman stated he had requested the Airport Director to keep him informed but has not heard from him and should have something for next month.

d) **Planning for Next Year: Commission Roster and Officers**

The Chair stated this would be the time to start thinking about who should be leading the Commission next year. He stated he wasn't sure if he wanted to continue as Chair of the Commission. Ms. Brunner shared the roster of the Commission. Ms. Chalice stated her home address is incorrect; this needs to be addressed with the Clerk's office. Ms. Brunner noted there are two vacant alternate positions, and Mr. Therriault will not be serving on the Commission next year. Ms. Brunner stated closer to the end of the year, anyone who is eligible to continue on the Commission would be contacted by staff to see if they would like another year on the Commission.

Mr. Haynes felt the Commission should give thought to people in the community who would perhaps like to serve.

Ms. Chalice suggested reaching out to individuals who are attending the Natural Resources Class who might like to serve. She felt many in that group are qualified individuals.

The group discussed possibilities of people who attend work groups who might be interested.

5. Correspondence

a) Connecticut River Conservancy – Voluntary Landowner Restoration Projects

Ms. Brunner explained that this letter is to advise the Conservation Commission about a program that the Connecticut River Conservancy offers. They work with property owners on stream restoration projects to help them come up with plans for projects and connect them with resources to make those projects happen. They meet with interested landowners to discuss opportunities to restore and protect the natural resources on their property. Ms. Brunner raised the possibility of Connecticut River Conservancy extending support to Willowbrook Association.

Ms. Chalice suggested a letter to the Connecticut River Conservancy asking if they will be willing to work with City owned land. Ms. Brunner stated if they were available and willing to work with public landowners, this would be something that would have to go through City Council. Ms. Chalice stated once staff gets the details she will be willing to write a letter to City Council.

Mr. Haynes asked whether the West Street Dam would fit into this category. Ms. Brunner stated she was not sure the scale of the project this entity would be looking at.

b) Parks & Rec Dept. – Urban Forestry Talk with Ethan Tapper on Oct. 23 at 3:00 PM

Ms. Chalice stated she highly recommends this speaker. She indicated that Mr. Tapper has purchased land outside of Bennington Vermont. He is a forester and a conservationist; very motivated to help to set people's expectations as to how we can improve forests in ways that are ecologically healthy as well as reasonable.

c) **NHACC – Annual Dues Request**

Ms. Richter explained these are annual dues for the 2026–2027 year.

A motion was made by Ken Bergman that the Conservation Commission approves payment of the NHACC Annual Dues in the amount of $950. The motion was seconded by Steve Bill and was unanimously approved with Barbara Richter abstaining.

Ms. Brunner asked if anyone on the Commission would like to attend this year's conference scheduled for November 7 in Pembroke, NH.

The Commission discussed how registration would work if the cost is covered by the Commission's budget. Ms. Brunner stated staff would register members and charge the Commission's budget for it. Discussion ensued about the cost of the conference, which has gone up in recent years.

Ms. Richter stated if there is a payment issue, this is something that can be worked out.

A motion was made by Michele Chalice that the Conservation Commission authorizes 50% registration coverage for attendance at the NHACC Annual Meeting for up to four people. The motion was seconded by Ken Bergman and was unanimously approved.

6. **New or Other Business**

Mr. Haynes talked about an Antioch student who was working with the Engineering Department on upstream and downstream invertebrates in relation to how that might affect what will happen with the West Street Dam. Mr. Haynes asked Ms. Brunner whether the state has condemned the dam.

Ms. Brunner stated this is the most recent information she has: On September 3rd, the dam was inspected by the City and the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, and we are waiting on a new letter of deficiency from NHDES, which they have promised that they will deliver this month. Ms. Brunner stated she would follow up on this.

Mr. Bill stated at the last workshop the State had said either the dam has to go or the City has to remove the temporary trees from the dike to the channel.

Ms. Brunner noted this is a capital project and is in the long-range financial plan for the City. She added she would obtain an update from engineering staff.

Ms. Chalice talked about attending the Radically Rural Workshop where the speaker talked about climate resilient neighborhoods in general. What was addressed at this meeting is what is happening in Greenfield, Massachusetts where once a month there is a joint meeting between committees to break down some silos. For example, the Conservation Commission, the Energy Committee and the Planning Board to meet and share ideas. She asked whether this is something the Commission would be interested in. Ms. Brunner stated this is something that has been discussed in the past.

It was noted no real business could be conducted to not run into 91-A issues where the meeting would need to be opened to the public. A potluck at a committee member's home was suggested after receiving approval from the City Attorney. If the groups would like to talk about what they are working on, it would need to be a public meeting.

Mr. Bergman referred to an email regarding a project completed at the Harris Center in collaboration with the Town of Swanzey and Keene State College regarding a culvert that was installed that is wildlife friendly and allows for fish passage. Ms. Richter raised the issue of upgrading stream crossings in Keene and recommended looking for this type of partnership to help with that effort.

7. **Next Meeting: Monday, November 16 (Recreation Center)**
8. **Adjourn**

There being no further business, Chair Flaherty adjourned the meeting at 5:57 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Krishni Pahl, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner