

ADOPTED

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, July 17, 2017

4:30 PM

2nd Floor Conference Room,
City Hall

Members Present:

Thomas Haynes, Chair
Sadie Butler, Vice Chair
Councilor Jan Manwaring
Councilor George Hansel
Andrew Madison
Brian Reilly
Denise Burchsted
Eloise Clark, Alternate

Staff Present:

Tara Kessler, Planner

Members Not Present:

Alexander Von Plinsky IV, Alternate

1) Call to Order

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

2) Approval of Minutes – June 19, 2017

Councilor Hansel made a motion to approve the minutes of June 19, 2017, which was seconded by Dr. Burchsted.

Dr. Burchsted noted the subcommittee is working on the “ARM fund priority list” not the ARM Fund itself. Chair Haynes noted on page 3/5 in the third paragraph it should read, “staff can only do so much.”

The motion to approve the minutes of June 9, 2017 carried unanimously as amended.

3) Communication and Notifications

a. Eversource Utility Maintenance Notification

Ms. Kessler noted this Commission has seen many similar utility maintenance notifications from Eversource for different locations in the past year for work in the right

of way. She indicated a topographic map of the area in question in the meeting packet. While this Commission has no ability to intervene in these matters, they can provide comments if necessary. This right of way runs through the Greater Goose Pond Forest. Councilor Manwaring said these maintenance activities are usually messy, but perhaps that is how they are supposed to be; she said it is messy in terms of what they leave behind after their work. She said it looks like trees are being taken down, though perhaps they are not finished yet. Ms. Clark said similar maintenance took place on her property and they did leave a lot of trimmed trees, logs, etc. behind.

Ms. Clark asked they type of work they will be doing at Goose Pond. Ms. Kessler replied to her knowledge routine clearing and maintenance in the right of way; she will ask for further details. Dr. Burchsted said it is hard to comment with the nature of the maintenance being so ambiguous. The Commission members agreed that given how often these notifications come before them, it would be nice to have clearer details on the nature of the maintenance taking place. It has been several years since Eversource made a presentation about maintenance to this Commission. Ms. Kessler will speak with the Wetlands Permit Liaison at NH DES as she is unclear even on their role in the right of way. She will get more details about this type of application, DES jurisdiction, and will ask Eversource to return and present to this Commission again on general maintenance practices in the right of way.

b. Kendall Road Water Main Replacement

There is still no update on this matter as the Wetland Permit application has yet to go through.

4) Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Plan RFQ Update

Ms. Kessler reported the RFQ process has been closed with two applicants – NE Forestry Consultants and Moosewood Ecological. Interviews began on July 18. If the selection Committee is happy with an applicant, Ms. Kessler will seek permission to enter a contract with the chosen firm from the FOP Committee, which will return to City Council for final approval the first week of August; at that point she can move forward with the contract and scope of work.

There was a significant difference in scoring between the two submissions; one firm scored 1-2.5/5 while the other scored 4.25-5/5. The firm ranked highest is aware of the \$30,000 implementation limit approved by City Council. There will be an update at the August meeting and by then a project schedule may be in place; the intention of the higher ranked firm is to start in late summer/fall providing a full year to sample in all seasons. The ideal end date for this project is July 2018. The higher ranked firm includes a forester and a trails consultant, who can specialize in recreational use of the forest.

A Steering Committee will be formed for this project at the discretion of the Mayor; Tad Lacey has been recommended to serve because of his experience with this project. It will be an Ad Hoc Committee so this Commission can still function separately and receive

regular updates. Ms. Butler and Mr. Madison offered to act as Commission liaisons on that Steering Committee; Ms. Kessler will pass those recommendations onto Mayor Lane.

5) Aquatic Resource Mitigation Subcommittee Update

Dr. Burchsted reported she has met with Barbara Skully and Ms. Clark; additionally she and Mr. Von Plinsky met with the Planning Director and the Director of Parks, Recreation and Facilities about possible projects in the City that align with the ARM Fund. She said it seemed that different projects and ideas could be lumped into “target areas” within the City:

- Most Prominent Target Areas
 - Beaver Brook
 - There is interest from many here in terms of water storage and flood control. There are possibilities for wetland restoration and conservation, especially in the cemetery. There is also interest in Carpenter Field, which is already in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Bridge replacements on the brook are also possibilities as infrastructure is important to the City and this would also contribute to improving flood water management and riparian zones. There is additional possible restoration off Baker Street and several other small projects along the brook.
 - Ashuelot River – in the City and east to Goose Pond
 - The West Street Dam
 - Purchasing the property behind Hannford’s
 - Purchases along Court Street that could help connect Tenant Swamp and Goose Pond
 - Work on Jonathan Daniels Trail water crossings
 - Possible culvert replacement
- Additional Possible Target Areas
 - Black and Hurricane Brooks
 - Among the highest priority for wildlife protection in the State
 - Fairly unprotected
 - Potential parcels for watershed protection along the brooks, less for restoration, but to add to protected land on Stern’s Hill
 - Tannery Brook
 - A previous project created for restoration by Pearl Street

Dr. Burchsted will continue working with Mr. Von Plinsky and follow-up with the Planning Director, the Director of Parks, Recreation and Facilities, the City Engineer, and the Public Works Director; she hopes they can help designate projects of greatest importance to the City and provide reality checks so she can come back to the Commission with a shorter list of possible projects. Once she has a more concise list, she will consult again with Laurie at the Arm Fund and cross check with the CIP; it makes sense to promote priority projects that are on both lists.

It came up again in these discussions that many parcels are zoned for conservation but are not permanently protected by Conservation Easements – Tenant Swamp, Beech Hill, etc. Dr. Burchsted said the Commission should be pursuing easements on those parcels to be managed by the Nature Conservancy or other organizations. Ms. Kessler provided an update on the Stacey Cole Trust – there is a deed restriction in place and land there cannot be developed so an easement is unnecessary; the goal is to preserve wildlife there and there is a mechanism in place to prevent development so it is lower priority in the City. Councilor Hansel commented he did not anticipate so many City projects aligning well with the Arm Fund; having concrete possibilities is encouraging.

Dr. Reilly commented that many parcels along the different brook watersheds are private landowner lots. Dr. Burchsted clarified they would just been looking at preservation along the river. Councilor Hansel added that many property owners along Hurricane Brook, for example, bought those parcels to contribute to conservation though they do not have formal easements. Dr. Burchsted said there was also conversation about the beautiful lower Ashuelot River areas at the edge of Keene into Swanzey.

Ms. Clark noted that Beech Hill and other areas have had easements but had to have a management plan in place first. At one point a management plan was started for Beech Hill and Chair Haynes noted that plan was complete by an Antioch student, though nothing has taken place in terms of implementation. Ms. Clark said if an easement was recommended in that management plan, this Commission can move forward on placing an easement at any time. Councilor Hansel cautioned against jumping into an easement without considering the other factors – cost, development pressure, etc. – high priority areas there would have to first be considered. Councilor Manwaring added this has been a topic for many years because while parts of Beech Hill are not developable, there has always been pressure to place telecommunication towers there. Ms. Kessler added another consideration is that the City owns three parcels on Beech Hill so if easements were placed on those parcels, a different easement holder would have to be found; the Nature Conservancy and Society for Protection of NH Forests, for example, both of which charge fees for holding easements.

Ms. Clark acknowledged that while this is part of a long process, the Commission is empowered to make moves to start. Councilor Hansel said he would feel better having priority lists first so the Commission can objectively say a parcel meets priorities as one of the most at-risk places in Keene. Mr. Madison agreed an easement is a significant undertaking, especially with the high development pressure on the parcel in question. The Commission agreed to first develop a list of criteria for priority areas and then begin ranking and identifying those areas. Councilor Manwaring will do some research for the August meeting on possible criteria and this could be a part of discussion in the upcoming Conservation Master Plan Retreat.

6) Conservation Master Plan Retreat Discussion

At the last meeting two options were identified: hire a consultant to work with the Commission through the entire master plan process, including the retreat, or hire a

consultant just to lead the retreat. The Commission agreed to move on this sooner than later to begin making some progress and all agreed Jeff Littleton is the ideal choice to hire and lead the retreat.

Councilor Hansel made a motion that staff negotiate with Jeff Littleton to facilitate the Conservation Master Plan Retreat, which was seconded by Mr. Madison and carried unanimously.

Ms. Kessler is unsure it will be possible to arrange the retreat by August, so it would more likely be September. Mr. Madison noted he has scheduling conflicts in September. Evenings that work best for the Commission include Wednesday, Thursday, and Tuesday after 6:00 PM. Ms. Kessler will move forward on this motion and coordinate with Mr. Littleton and the Commission to schedule the retreat.

7) New or Other Business

8) Adjournment – Next meeting date Monday, August 21, 2017

Hearing no further business, Chair Haynes adjourned the meeting at 5:18 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker