

**City of Keene**  
**New Hampshire**

**CONSERVATION COMMISSION**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Monday, August 15, 2016**

**4:30 PM**

**2nd Floor Conference Room**  
**City Hall**

**Members Present:**

Thomas P. Haynes, Chair  
Thomas Lacey  
Jan Manwaring, Councilor  
Denise Burchsted  
Brian Reilly  
Andrew Madison, Alternate  
George Hansel, Councilor (Departed at 5:30 PM)

**Staff Present:**

Tara Kessler, Planner

**Members Not Present:**

Sadie Butler

**1) Call to Order**

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

**2) Approve Meeting Minutes- July 18, 2016**

Chair Haynes noted a typo on page 6/11. His name is misspelled as "Chair Hayne," and should be corrected to "Chair Haynes."

Dr. Reilly made a motion to accept the minutes of July 18, 2016 as amended, which was seconded by Councilor Hansel and carried unanimously.

**3) Presentation fo Community Forest Resource Management Options – Steve Roberge, UNH Cooperative Extension Field Specialist, Natural Resource & County Office Administrator**

Chair Haynes welcomed Mr. Roberge and noted the Commission's interest in learning more about Keene's forests and how to study/inventory them.

Mr. Roberge stated that he is an extension forester for Cheshire County and Hillsboro County and he has a background in forestry, land management, and forestry science. His goal is to work with landowners to help them understand the resources and management options for their properties. He views municipalities like Keene the same as private landowners, as the City Council and Conservation Commission make decisions to manage lands and use resources on behalf of the City of Keene.

Mr. Roberge noted that he has reviewed Keene's past management plans and there was once timber harvesting on City-owned forest property. He works to help landowners, like Keene,

make management decisions responsibly. He gave the example of Stearns Hill. While it is an isolated property, it is used recreationally and those who recreate there have to be considered when making management decisions. He said that management and recreation are not mutually exclusive. He noted that many lessons could be learned from Pisgah State Park's recent experiences with changing how forests are managed. While it is ultimately up to the landowner, the public uses of the property need to be considered. He noted that urban forest management is also important for communities to consider, especially given the costs of removing urban trees, which can range between \$300-\$500 per tree.

Mr. Roberge continued, stating that management plans help to prepare the City for future liabilities. For example, the Emerald Ash Borer has had a significant impact on some municipalities in NH. In Keene approximately one-third of the trees in downtown are Ash. Mr. Roberge suggested that it would be good to create a plan and allocate funds to address the threats of invasive species, such as the Emerald Ash Borer.

Chair Haynes opened the discussion, asking if members had questions of Mr. Roberge.

Councilor Manwaring questioned if forest inventories are the best place to begin for a municipality. Mr. Roberge replied that while it is a great way to start, he would suggest beginning at a different scale. He suggested first looking at city-owned lands on a map and understanding the different types of land and land uses. He noted it might be better to begin forest management activities on land that has lower levels of recreation. He explained that with landowners, he will ask them to draw their property and indicate how they use different parts of that property. Therefore, the first step is to identify the properties, what they are mainly used for, where management could improve properties, and determine trends.

Mr. Roberge continued that he believes the second step is a forest inventory. The inventory should be conducted with the identified goal for the land in mind, whether it be timber harvesting or wildlife management, etc. He said with the amount of property the City has, he imagines there would be many goals.

Mr. Lacey noted there are not many properties within the City limits that are not used for recreation so this will be a challenge. He explained that one charge of the Goose Pond conservation easement is to implement a stewardship plan, which, to his knowledge, has not occurred. The goal of the easement was both recreation and wildlife management. He thinks good forest management is to mitigate natural disasters like pest invasions or hurricanes. He believes that those who use Goose Pond actively for recreation will be concerned with changes and he is also interested in how current recreation activities affect wildlife; perhaps, there are opportunities for wildlife management that have been overlooked. He stated that he feels Mr. Roberge was conservative in suggesting that a community begin management efforts where recreation is low because there are not many of these areas. Mr. Roberge replied that this is why one of the most important parts of management is education.

Chair Haynes asked what other characteristics of City properties they should consider in addition to wildlife, recreation, and invasive species. Mr. Roberge replied forest health is important and is related to invasive species. Timber management is one way to improve and restore forest health. For example, low-grade white pine generates income and creates early successional habitat when removed. Mr. Roberge continued that Keene is dominated by red pine, which makes habitats unsuitable for other species. He recommends removing it and replacing it with white pine or oaks.

Mr. Roberge continued that another characteristic to consider is structural diversity and diversification of the forest landscape. He noted that there is minimal structural diversity in Keene's forests. Letting old growth prosper and managing younger timber improves the structural diversity of the landscape which builds forest resilience. Mr. Lacey agreed and noted the differences between an older unmanaged forest like the Horatio Colony Nature Preserve compared to a property with active cutting. Mr. Roberge added that forest inventories are important to determine sensitive forest areas, the special parts of the forest to protect or buffer, and where timber harvests can take place.

Councilor Hansel asked if Keene would need to hire a forester to sustainably complete this project. Mr. Roberge replied yes, at least a consultant with the experience needed to lead an inventory or timber harvest. A forester will develop prescriptions to meet the goals developed by a consultant. Mr. Roberge added that finding the right forester is important. He continued that it will be costly to inventory all properties at once and suggested identifying priority properties. This would also allow the City to establish a relationship with a forester and examine their work on a smaller scale.

Chair Haynes questioned if a consultant should be asked to gather as much information about the selected properties as possible. Mr. Roberge replied that it depends on the overall goal. He said there is no shame in generating revenue from timber when handled responsibly and sustainably. It is also important to look at the City's goals regarding recreation and wildlife, which are important to the public. He suggested asking the forester to identify opportunities to enhance revenue (sustainably sell timber), enhance recreation (maintain and improve trails), and maintain and improve wildlife habitat. Those are three basic management goals.

Chair Haynes noted that each parcel would look different as will the questions asked about each parcel. Mr. Roberge agreed and added it is a lot of work for a lot of properties. It is critical to determine 1) why the City owns the land and 2) what the City can do to meet the goals for the land.

Councilor Manwaring noted the problem of dam deficiency in Keene, particularly the Babbidge and Woodward dams. People are not generally welcomed on these properties but they need to be managed because they are overgrown and inaccessible. She is concerned that in fixing these dams, a lot of forest will be clear-cut with little knowledge about those forests.

Mr. Lacey commented that in reading the Merrimack Biodiversity and Conservation Plan they speak a lot of inventorying plant communities, something Keene is lacking. Decision-making cannot occur until knowledge of plant communities is acquired.

Dr. Reilly noted it would be frustrating to go through these survey and inventory processes to only find out that the community or City Council are unsupportive of a timber harvest. Chair Haynes agreed but added that he is trying not to think of management as only timber harvest. There are multiple aspects of management including timber harvest, recreation, wildlife, etc. Dr. Reilly noted that management implies doing something, whether it is cutting trees or improving trails. Dr. Burchsted added that it seems this needs to be a public process throughout and that education and joint stewardship are primary goals and will assist in the public understanding the need to cut trees. Having an inventory will be critical and hopefully people will be involved in the process and understand the right decisions.

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Mr. Lacey commented that there is good documentation of what forestry has taken place in Keene but when it came time for further inventory, it was avoided because the idea of management is thought of as cutting trees. A forest inventory does not automatically mean extensive timber harvest; it is to help make decisions. Ms. Kessler added that perhaps in the past, that could have been due to lack of public education and awareness, which is why public awareness needs to be incorporated through the entire process. Mr. Lacey agreed and noted that if the public disagrees that is fine as long as they disagree after understanding all relevant information. Chair Haynes agreed and noted that education is a critical component moving forward.

Councilor Hansel commented that he likes the idea of a tree replacement or beautification fund so the public knows that when trees are removed they are being replaced. Chair Haynes added that maintaining the holistic forest health is a goal.

Dr. Burchsted questioned the extent to which they should focus on street trees as opposed to forests. She noted the benefit of cultivating street trees and she is curious how to approach managing the unclear land holding. Mr. Roberge replied that urban assets are more difficult. Street trees are excellent for climate mitigation, aesthetics, etc. so you do not want to remove trees without replacing them. He provided the example of Worcester, MA, where entire streets of trees had to be removed due to the Asian Longhorn Beetle. Trees are replaced with juvenile trees, which require time to mature. He noted a tree removal plan is a mitigation strategy to be proactive before a disaster occurs. Mr. Roberge noted the rule of thumb for City trees is that no more than 10% of trees should be the same species, no more than 20% of the same genus, and no more than 30% in the same family. This manages for diversity and prevents diseases from spreading. He noted the goal of silviculture is to mimic natural processes. For example, thinning a forest mimics the natural process of hurricane winds. Prescription cuttings mimic natural processes and accelerate them. Forests will not necessarily be healthier but will likely be because of increased diversity.

Mr. Lacey added that there is no reason why City lands need to cost the City money. A piece of land should be able to support itself under the charge of a conservation easement. The City has a responsibility to manage land under the terms of the easement, which can be done at no expense if managed properly.

Mr. Roberge noted that Roxbury is unique watershed land in Keene. It is one in a small collection of unmanaged municipal watershed lands. Management seeks to build resilience. Manchester is an example of managing watershed land for resilience.

Chair Haynes asked Mr. Roberge if he has lists of local foresters. Mr. Roberge replied yes, there are 66 licensed foresters in Cheshire County and plenty of local foresters who would be happy to work for the City. Ms. Kessler asked for examples of other towns in Cheshire County actively managing and harvesting forests. Mr. Roberge noted Manchester, Concord, Claremont, Hannover, and Sharon. He added that Ron Klemarczyk, Concord's City Forester, is a good resource because he does trail work as well. He provided the example of Cheshire County Farm, which has cost the County nothing over the last 25 years by generating \$5,000 per year in timber.

Dr. Burchsted asked if any localities have urban tree management plans. Mr. Roberge replied that Keene State College is currently doing some work on that and he is meeting with the arborist in charge of the project this fall. There was also a recent tree inventory for downtown Keene. He agreed to send some resources to Ms. Kessler. He added that Scott Rolfe works for the NH Division of Forested Lands and he is available to help towns and get them started with urban

inventories free of charge. Additionally, Keene State College has a good inventory of downtown trees and there is also an iPhone app that helps with tree identification. Dr. Burchsted asked if urban management plans are common. Mr. Roberge replied that replacement plans are becoming more common.

The Commission thanked Mr. Roberge for his time and he departed the meeting at 5:42 PM.

**4) Communication and Notification**

**a. Wetland Permit Application Request for Information – NH route 12 State Bridge 137/059**

Ms. Kessler indicated this is just a notification to keep the Commission aware as notices are received from the NH Department of Environmental Services (DES). DES is requesting more information from the City and its consultant on this permit application.

**b. Shoreland Permit Application Request for Information- 690 Marlboro Road**

Ms. Kessler indicated this is a notification that the Shoreland Bureau is asking for more information and clarification from the applicant on this permit application. On August 22, the planning board will review the site plan for this project, and a condition of approval from the Planning Board would be that the applicant procure the required Shoreland Permit.

**c. Routine Roadway and Railway Maintenance Activities Notification- Sullivan Center Road Ditch Work**

Ms. Kessler indicated this matter requires no action. It is a notification that the project will involve removal of sediment from the drainage ditch.

**5) Surface Water Protection Ordinance Proposed Amendments**

Chair Haynes thanked Ms. Kessler for adding the proposed amendments to the ordinance.

Mr. Lacey noted a correction to the definition of ‘buffer’ - ‘vegetative’ is removed and should be included.

Dr. Burchsted asked if they need to define ‘manmade ditches and soils.’ Mr. Lacey replied that he does not think so because the proposed edits remove the opportunity to define streams and brooks as manmade ditches and swales.

Dr. Burchsted asked if they need to define ‘maintenance and vegetative control of the buffer.’ Mr. Lacey replied that this edit was suggested by the City Engineer. He noted that the language addresses the need to maintain the tax ditches. Ms. Kessler will speak with the City Engineer about this language and will report back in September.

**6) Conservation Master Plan**

Chair Haynes noted that everyone was to read the Merrimack Biodiversity and Conservation Plan for this meeting. He opened the conversation to what Commission members liked and disliked about that plan.

Councilor Manwaring commented that she liked Merrimack’s structure and process. They surveyed each habitat in the town and developed objectives and action plans for each. Chair Haynes agreed and added that it was easy to read and understand.

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Dr. Reilly noted he liked that the initial consultant was given specific goals from the Conservation Commission and was able to translate those goals into a specific plan with a purpose. They focused on what issues should be addressed, by whom, when, and how over 5-10 years. The Commission members noted they liked the chart at the end of the plan.

Councilor Manwaring added that she liked that they had three public sessions to educate the public. She noted that the Keene Commission has had an intern at various times in the past to work on such projects.

Mr. Lacey complemented the author of the plan for its readability. He said they alluded to forest management but he wished the plan had been more site-specific. The setup of the report was good but he thought the forest component was too focused on a near extinct species as opposed to the holistic forest composition in the area. He thinks it would be a great document if site specificity for municipally-owned parcels were added.

Dr. Burchsted added that the Merrimack plan seems to primarily focus on wildlife whereas Keene is focusing on multiple priorities, such as greenways and in-stream habitats. She worries that Keene is trying to do too much and that perhaps each component will require its own plan. She would like to see something this order of magnitude for each sector they are focusing on. Chair Haynes noted that they do not know the context in which the Merrimack plan was written and perhaps their objectives get into more detail. Dr. Reilly added that they prominently feature 'biodiversity' in the title of their plan which may indicate that wildlife is the focus. Chair Haynes recounted that they are not trying to duplicate the Merrimack plan, only use it as a model. Mr. Madison noted that it seems like more of a wildlife management plan than a multiuse plan.

Mr. Lacey said from the Merrimack plan he realized the need to hire a consultant to collect data and that the Commission should worry less about working groups and trying to achieve certain things and focus on defining what they want. For example, if the forest at Goose Pond was surveyed, they could have layers of maps to visualize what is going on there.

Chair Haynes noted that generally everyone liked the Merrimack plan, even if it does not cover the full scope of Keene's goals. Two things he noticed were landscape level considerations and mention of corridors. He asked what Commission members thought of the 'conservation focus areas' in the plan. Dr. Reilly thought they made sense and thinks Keene can do the same by identifying hotspot areas. Dr. Burchsted liked the focus areas but thinks maps need to be the priority to break land holdings into areas of interest.

Mr. Lacey indicated that Concord's scope of work is good because the consultant is charged with reviewing all of the NRI's conducted so as to not reinvent the wheel. He sees a consultant doing the same for Keene.

Dr. Burchsted questioned how valuable the Merrimack plan has been to their Commissioners. Ms. Kessler reviewed the conversation in the last meeting minutes about her conversation with the Merrimack Conservation Commission chair for Dr. Burchsted.

Chair Haynes asked what is next for the Commission. Mr. Lacey encouraged proceeding with gathering information with a forest profile to start. He said a forest survey will save money and time in the long term. Ms. Kessler asked if they need to identify a place to start. Mr. Lacey said he would focus on Goose Pond because of the charge to have a stewardship plan in the conservation easement. Councilor Manwaring noted that two years ago the NH Forest Society,

who holds the easement, provided a list of things to focus on at Goose Pond. Dr. Burchsted suggested beginning at Stearn's Hill because there is not as much active recreation, as Mr. Roberge suggested, or starting with both.

Chair Haynes noted that he is looking at the bigger picture and liked the idea of conservation focus areas. He asked if Goose Pond would be a conservation focus area. Mr. Lacey and Councilor Manwaring replied yes, because Goose Pond is more than 1,000 acres. Chair Haynes asked if they want to get an initial list of all conservation areas being considered and then begin to pick and choose how to deal with them before choosing one to start with. He also suggested looking at conservation focus areas while Goose Pond is being surveyed. Councilor Manwaring said she would like to begin with Goose Pond so the Commission can spend some of their budget. She thinks both activities can be done at the same time. Dr. Burchsted added that she likes the way Mr. Littleton identified conservation focus areas and she thinks that can be done concurrently with surveying Goose Pond, which seems like an important place to start.

Chair Haynes suggested creating a list of what the Commission wants to accomplish at Goose Pond with a survey as number one priority. Ms. Kessler agreed to share the 2006 Goose Pond management plan with the Commission. Commission members will review that plan for the September meeting.

Dr. Reilly noted his concern that there are a few parcels that everyone agrees are focus areas, but how will the Commission choose what to prioritize after that. He said they need a plan for how to prioritize areas. He suggested that now is the time to bring a consultant in to help with that. Chair Haynes questioned if Goose Pond can be a model for the rest of the City's properties. Dr. Burchsted indicated there are other questions they are trying to answer that a consultant could help with. She noted being careful to understand the Commission's objectives which will take more time.

Dr. Reilly suggested now is the time to generate a list of consultants and move toward choosing one. Ms. Kessler noted that before that, they will need to create a scope of work so they can know who is best suited. Chair Haynes asked if they are clear yet on what they would be asking of a consultant. Dr. Reilly noted they can give a consultant general ideas and they can guide the Commission. Chair Haynes questioned if there is someone who can come talk about conservation focus areas. Ms. Kessler suggested those who created the scope of work for Concord. She also mentioned Steve Whitman, a NH planner, who had an innovative response to the Concord RFQ. She said she can also take specific questions to Mr. Littleton and he may be able to share what he could offer with his services before the scope of work goes out.

Councilor Manwaring suggested not having a speaker at the next meeting and focusing the time on creating a scope of work. Chair Haynes agreed.

**7) New or Other Business**

**8) Staff Updates**

**a. Woodland Cemetery Wetland Restoration**

Ms. Kessler informed the Commission that the construction of this restoration project is underway.

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Chair Haynes added that he spoke with Mr. Madison before the meeting about being a conduit from the Commission for the Roaring Brook Watershed Management Plan project's working committee and he agreed to do so.

**9) Adjournment**

The next meeting will take place Monday, September 19, 2016. Dr. Burchsted noted that she is teaching Mondays at 4:30 PM this fall so she will likely not be at most meetings.

Hearing no further business, Chair Haynes adjourned the meeting at 6:48 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,  
Tara Kessler, Planner