

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, November 21, 2016

4:30 PM

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

Members Present:

Thomas P. Haynes, Chair
George Hansel, Councilor
Jan Manwaring, Councilor
Dr. Brian Reilly
Thomas Lacey
Sadie Butler
Andrew Madison, Alternate

Staff Present:

Tara Kessler, Planner
Jack Wozmak, Airport Manager

Members Not Present:

Denise Burchsted

1) Call to Order

Chair Haynes called the meeting to order at 4:32 PM.

2) Approval of Minutes- October, 17, 2016

Dr. Reilly noted the following correction: on page 5/17, first paragraph, line two, “management plan,” should be changed to, “forest management plan.”

Councilor Hansel made a motion to accept the minutes of October 17, 2016 as corrected, which was seconded by Dr. Reilly and carried unanimously.

3) Communication and Notifications

4) Greater Goose Pond Resource Inventory

Chair Haynes welcomed Mr. Wozmak to share about the airport’s forest management efforts and the RFP used for that work.

Mr. Wozmak stated he thinks land management is a good thing and how we act as stewards over it is worthy of our time and thought. He has done this sort of work throughout his career. Because of this, when he came to work at the airport in Keene, he focused on talking to neighbors not just about cutting trees, but a more methodical way to

find balance between competing land use needs. He has lived in Keene for 25 years, and on other City lands there are similar scenarios. He has never had a sense this City is a steward over a lot of property it owns and those properties are out of balance because of historic planting, etc. When he looked at eliminating white pine at the airport, he wanted to value the understory, understood what he wanted the legacy of the forest to be, and let that legacy drive removing obstacles to aviation; a balanced approach to land management. He said it seems he and the Commission share interest in being responsible stewards of the land so it can be a stable resource for generations.

Chair Haynes asked Mr. Wozmak to talk about the RFP process. Mr. Wozmak replied he used many standardized websites to lay the foundation for an evidence-based forest management plan. He composed it from various resources; the University of New Hampshire (UNH) Cooperative Extension was helpful. He wanted to get all the right partners so the plan looks at science, evidence, and disciplines that take all parts of the forest into account; a team approach. Chair Haynes noted that is what the Commission is seeking as well. Mr. Wozmak continued that the Audubon Society came to the airport and found there were 161 species of birds inhabiting the property. He has learned a lot from the various professional.

Councilor Hansel asked if Mr. Wozmak was satisfied with the RFP process and results. Mr. Wozmak said he would not change anything, it is a good RFP. Three foresters responded and were interviewed. While they all had similar forestry knowledge, the differences lied in the outward presentation, their sensitivity to public concerns, their ability to interact with the public, experience on public land with multiple stakeholders, and ability to educate the community. He said in these potentially contentious situations, sometimes the messenger is more important than the message.

Mr. Lacey said he thought the forester presentation at the airport was excellent; he thought the management plan and reasons were communicated well. It was not a straight forward forest management issue because the forest abuts people's homes. He thought the foresters were able to separate some of the emotions of that issue and focus on what was happening in the forest and what can happen in the forest, making it easier for people to accept. Mr. Wozmak agreed that is where developing a forest management plan aligns with landowner objectives. He said one of the first forms any forester should provide the Commission is questionnaire about objectives for the land. That is where cohabitation comes in – one of the fundamental perceptions of forest management is in cases where there are competing and mixed-uses, and when landowner objectives conflict with forest principles. He said in some places, the best practice is the leave the forest alone.

Chair Haynes said going out and discussing the plan in the forest was immensely helpful for those who needed visuals. He asked Mr. Wozmak if his goals were defined in advance. Mr. Wozmak replied the plan that came back from the foresters help him define his goals; he was loyal to their recommendations, for example natural versus planted reforestation. His ultimate goal was developed by the plan and he thinks that is a responsible way to approach the situation. He said the City's goals will likely be different for each property.

Councilor Manwaring said it was clear the foresters cared about the forest, which has not been clear in the Airport Master Plan. Mr. Wozmak noted he did not want the consultants to have any history of the airport because he wanted an unbiased plan.

Mr. Lacey said he thought the effort to bridge the gap was outstanding. He was amazed by the diversity of habitat around the airport. Mr. Wozmak agreed and for that reason they are considering adding more trails, especially in the bird areas along the Ashuelot River, and maybe interpretive signs. It can develop into a resource people want to visit.

Charles Daloz, 37 Church Street, Keene, asked how the bog will be protected. Mr. Wozmak replied it is in the plan and between the wildlife ecologist, foresters, and Cooperative Extension, there is an approach to address trees which obstruct aviation and maintain the bog. There is a clear and detailed plan of how to do that properly. Some of the dead trees might be topped to create additional habitat.

Chair Haynes asked if the Commission should model the airport plan or adapt it. Mr. Lacey asked how much information Mr. Wozmak was able to provide interviewees so they could judge the time commitment. Mr. Wozmak replied there are accessible resources such as the National Resource Conservation Service soil maps, Google Earth – provides general ideas of property lines, and Will Schoeffman is a valuable GIS resource on City staff. Chair Haynes said the boundary surveys of Goose Pond just need to be found.

Chair Haynes asked if the airport RFP is something to model. Councilor Hansel replied it depends if focusing solely on Goose Pond or multiple parcels. Mr. Wozmak said he hoped the RFP would be a pilot to introduce a Forester of Record for the City. That way, as forest management plans are developed for each stand, an RFP does not have to be done each time. Having somebody for a set amount of years as a City Forester might make things easier, establish a continuity of product, and allow for a plan. Councilor Hansel said that approach would be different and harder than the airport. Mr. Wozmak replied yes, it would be a full-time City forester, a qualified person to look at properties and present a plan for various tracts of land and how to prioritize them. Chair Haynes said, in thinking about the Conservation Master Plan, they are thinking about that big picture. The Commission is trying to do two things – 1. Move forward on the Conservation Master Plan for the City, and 2. Start forest inventories that would be in the Conservation Master Plan.

Dr. Reilly said Goose Pond has been identified because it is the largest parcel; perhaps if a forester looked at multiple parcels, Goose Pond may be lower priority. Mr. Lacey replied the Goose Pond also has the conservation easement which calls for a forest management plan which led to prioritization. Chair Haynes said the exercise of creating the RFP will create a model for other parcels and he does not think it is a wasted effort. Ms. Kessler recalled she consulted with Concord on their Conservation Master Plan. They have a City Forester who implements their city-wide forest management plan. Goose Pond could be a pilot for parcels that have similar habitat and recreation goals. It

might be good to focus on goals for City-owned lands in conservation easement first. Ultimately, a bigger picture objective could be looking at all parcels comprehensively and developing a plan with a forester to implement those action items on a yearly basis. It is the Commission's choice what level to start at. Steve Roberge guided the Commission to define where it makes most sense to start based on landowner objectives.

Mr. Lacey noted the necessity for management at Goose Pond based on intense use and unique ecology. People think management should not occur where they hike, but he thinks management will make it more hike-able in the long term. Also, when natural disturbances occur, there is a plan in place to address it. Ms. Kessler said, looking at the objectives, choosing an area of recreation to start could conversely cause pushback because of the visibility. Mr. Lacey is confident if the foresters can communicate as well as those at the airport did, it will be a good thing. He also suggested displaying the inventory at the kiosk.

Chair Haynes said he feels the Commission has been on track with Goose Pond and thinks they should continue that focus if nothing more than as a learning process. Councilor Manwaring agreed noting the need to use budget funds to ensure the Commission continues receiving funds from the Council. She asked the forest acreage at the airport and Mr. Wozmak replied 1,044 acres. Councilor Manwaring said it is messy at Goose Pond and noted the Eversource work off Gilsum Road. Mr. Wozmak said part of the dialogue to have with the forester is what sort of forest management approach could limit the impacts of Eversource vegetation control.

Councilor Hansel said to keep in mind looking at all parcels in the City. He sees this as an example of breaking the public into the idea of forest management and he hopes Goose Pond can be a successful example. He said there are problematic parcels, Wheelock for example, where trees are becoming a hazard. Mr. Wozmak agreed that a fire at Wheelock Park right now would destroy the park. That is how landowner objectives change stand to stand and why he likes an overview for the legacy you want to set – the plan, philosophy, and long term goal. Councilor Hansel thinks it is important to have an example parcel within the City to accompany the airport example and prepare the public for a larger endeavor.

Councilor Hansel said part of the larger plan will also be determining the potential financial sustainability. The Commission may learn things like that from Goose Pond. The acreage producing income could go toward retaining a forester. Mr. Wozmak said it is not about cutting trees for money but managing the forest in a sustainable way; sometimes cutting trees benefits the greater forest. It is not about timber operations, it is about the goal of the City to have a legacy of good land management. The forest management plan will break down what is required to pay for itself and will give a sense of board feet and timber quantified per acre. Dr. Reilly said he thinks that is what they tried to do in the Goose Pond easement; that is part of the legacy of the property.

Councilor Manwaring said politically, with a long term forest management plan, it is good to bring back up for reaffirmation at the City Council level so it remains viewed and valued in the community.

Chair Haynes said in thinking about the Goose Pond forest inventory, it seems the Commission wants to move forward with the process. He thinks the Conservation Master Plan will be another step. He would like to see what is out there to work with instead of creating a blind plan. Dr. Reilly was concerned that in only having an inventory of Goose Pond, there will be nothing to compare it to. Mr. Wozmak replied the inventory is approximately 80% of a forest management plan and when combined with landowner objectives, the difference between the two is insignificant. He said the only purpose of the inventory is to know what to do for the next 200 years, the plan is physically walking the property and determining where everything is and marrying that with landowner objectives. The airport forest management plan is 120 pages and 80% of that is inventory related, the remaining 20% is what to do with it. Councilor Hansel thinks a complete forest management plan for this parcel will teach the Commission a lot and will lessen work for the Conservation Master Plan with an actual model to use throughout the City. He does not think it is wrong to focus on a doable parcel and do it well as an example; this will be an example of what the goal is throughout the City.

Councilor Manwaring asked how to authorize the airport RFP. Ms. Kessler replied the Commission would put together a broad goal, scope of work, and qualifications sought. The Commission can then seek permission from Council to authorize use of the Land Use Tax Change Fund, and then solicit for proposals. Councilor Hansel asked if there should be a sub-committee to develop the scope of work. Ms. Kessler said if the Commission narrows the overall focus, goal, and products wants she is happy to draft a scope of work for the next meeting.

Chair Haynes said what happened at the airport is what he envisions – a whole team coming together – so he thinks it is a good model. Dr. Reilly asked if the forester hired for the airport brought the team. Mr. Wozmak replied yes, he made clear he wanted a team, suggested categories, and was open to what they thought. He will email the final plan to Ms. Kessler.

Ms. Kessler asked the timeframe between selecting foresters and receiving a draft of the plan. Mr. Wozmak replied three months for approximately 300 acres. The RFP process took longer than the actual work. The total cost for developing the plan was \$3,000. Mr. Wozmak was amazed at the cost considering the hours of work, but he is paying the wildlife ecologist and Cooperative Extension separately; that total just paid the two foresters. Those two foresters will also manage the implementation to make sure it is done correctly, and they will be paid for that through revenue from the trees removed.

Mr. Madison asked if Mr. Wozmak reached out to KSC or Antioch in the RFP process. Mr. Wozmak replied yes, and Antioch has done work on the airport property in the past so a lot of information from that reinforced the forester's conclusions.

Ms. Kessler is happy to work with a sub-committee on the RFP process and develop a draft based on what the Commission has discussed. Chair Haynes said the airport RFP stated, “the City is seeking a plan that includes the following...” He asked if there is anything else that should be included in that list. Mr. Daloz suggested not neglecting the agricultural component; he thinks it is not impossible to have small homes on these properties with a forester living there maintaining the property and introduce productivity into the system. Councilor Manwaring said she is not pleased with forest recreation for Goose Pond; she would like to see the effect of trails on wildlife addressed.

Mr. Wozmak suggested each member complete a landowner objective form for Goose Pond to develop consensus to guide a forester; he will send that form to Ms. Kessler.

5) Conservation Master Plan

Chair Haynes said the Commission will start thinking about the big picture while discussing Goose Pond.

6) Election of Chair

Mr. Lacey is leaving the Commission at the end of his first term and Mr. Madison will take his place. The Commission needs to recruit for alternate members.

Councilor Hansel made a motion to reelect Chair Haynes for another term, which was seconded by Dr. Reilly and carried unanimously.

7) New or Other Business

a. Commission Retreat

Chair Haynes noted the Commission has not talked about the Conservation Master Plan in detail and asked if a retreat to focus on that after the New Year would be helpful. Dr. Reilly asked that the Commission be further in the Goose Pond process to have information to utilize during that retreat. Councilor Hansel agreed and suggested that will make the plan easier to put together. He thinks that master plan could be a guidepost for economic development issues that are high on the City agenda. Chair Haynes said conservation and economic development are not mutually exclusive. Mr. Lacey added some people might be pleasantly surprised that in addition to habitat and recreation, there could be economic benefits as well. The Commission will revisit the idea of a retreat later in 2017.

b. Other

8) Staff Updates

Ms. Kessler submitted a memo to the City Council and Mayor with a request for the Conservation Commission to submit an amendment to the Surface Water Protection Ordinance. It will go before the PLD on December 7 at 7:00 PM. Councilor Manwaring

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asked that it be the last thing on the PLD agenda so as to not conflict with another meeting.

9) Adjournment – Next Meeting December 19, 2016

Hearing no further business, Chair Haynes adjourned the meeting at 5:46 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker