

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

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

**Monday, September 21, 2015      4:30 PM      2nd Floor Conference Room, City Hall**

**Members Present:**

Chair Thomas P. Haynes  
Matthew Walton  
George Hansel  
Thomas Lacey  
Councilor Janis Manwaring

**Staff Present:**

Rhett Lamb, Planning Director  
Tara Germond, Planner

**Members Not Present:**

Brian Reilly

**Others Present:**

Denise Burchsted

**1. Call to order**

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

**2. Minutes – August 17, 2015**

Mr. Walton made a motion to accept the minutes of August 17, 2015. Mr. Lacey seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

**3. Conservation Master Plan**

Chair Haynes referred to the maps that Ms. Germond created as per requested by the Commission. Ms. Germond laid out base maps and stated that these maps show city-owned parcels and information on land in conservation, agricultural soils, wildlife habitat, and surface water resources. She noted that the Commission can use these maps as a starting point for determining which areas are the highest priorities. She continued, stating that the larger aerial map shows land that is in conservation city-wide, city-owned land that is in conservation, and city-owned land that is not in conservation.

Chair Haynes asked Mr. Lacey to comment on the maps and how they might fit with the Conservation Plan. Ms. Germond reminded the Commission that many parcels owned by the city on these maps are parks or cemeteries. She continued, stating that the Goose Pond trails are not on the map but she believes this data is available. Mr. Hansel requested the definition of a “supporting landscape.” Ms. Germond stated that this term refers to land that is not ranked as either highest ranked habitat or highest ranked habitat in the biological region of the land but has

ecological value. Supporting landscapes include land that connect critical habitat, contain important resources such as large forest blocks or species of special concern. Ms. Germond stated that these rankings also include a review of habitat type and the status of wildlife species.

Mr. Hansel asked if all city owned parcels are on the online tax database of Keene. Mr. Lamb stated that land in conservation may have to be reviewed through a deed. Mr. Lamb pointed out that the greater Goose Pond area has over 1,000 acres. Mr. Lacey stated that although Goose Pond has a conservation easement there has never been a thorough inventory and this should be addressed. Mr. Lamb stated that Goose Pond had a baseline Natural Resource Inventory done approximately six years ago during the conservation easement process. Mr. Lacey stated that the boundary information is obtained every year and asked Mr. Lamb if a perimeter survey has ever occurred. Mr. Lamb stated that there are still separate deeds for separate parcels but there is not a single representation of the perimeter as a whole. Mr. Lacey asked if there is an accurate survey of each parcel. Mr. Lamb stated that it is very likely but he will verify. He continued, stating that the NRI from Goose Pond should be reviewed first and then the Commission can determine if further studies are needed.

Mr. Walton asked if the primary utility of a Natural Resource Inventory is to put a parcel into a conservation easement. Mr. Lamb replied that this is part of the reason but the main utility is how the land should be managed in the future. He continued, stating examples such as trails development, timber or a keeping the land in a natural state. Mr. Lamb stated that these inventories also create a baseline condition of the land.

Mr. Walton asked what the difference is between land in conservation and an easement. Mr. Lamb stated that the highest level of protection is a third party easement similar to Goose Pond. Mr. Lamb gave an example of the Cole property which is a donated estate with a condition of staying in its natural state. He continued, stating that if the city acquires land with a precondition term of the intended use then the City does not need to put a conservation easement on it. Mr. Lamb referred back to an incident when Verizon wanted to put a cell tower on Beech Hill, which was assumed to be conservation land but was not. He continued, stating that this is a City Council decision as to how to use the property if it is not conservation land.

Mr. Walton stated that the land determined to have a critical habitat should be the focus of the Commission and wonders if easements are necessary on lands that do not have one. Chair Haynes stated that these are the questions that need to be answered by the Commission at some point. Mr. Walton suggested prioritizing specific resources under air, land or water. Chair Haynes stated that some of these topics have been discussed. Mr. Walton suggested pinpointing sections of these resources and tackling specific items. Mr. Hansel suggested picking specific lines from the Comprehensive Master Plan and connecting it to the Conservation Plan. He continued, stating that it would be valuable if this plan could link back to the Master Plan. Mr. Lamb agreed and stated that the Conservation Plan should be complimentary and not conflict with the Comprehensive Master Plan.

Mr. Walton inquired about the Master Plan and asked Mr. Lamb to locate a copy. Mr. Lacey stated that he would like to see an analysis of forest resources and an inventory of the areas located on the maps in green. Mr. Lacey stated that once resources are determined along with land uses then a forester's detailed report or Natural Resource Inventory can be conducted and recreational uses recommended.

Ms. Burchsted asked what the intention of the plan is. Chair Haynes stated that the goal was to determine conservation priorities for city-owned land but not ignore private land. Mr. Hansel stated that he foresees a possible section of the plan referring to non-city owned lands. Chair Haynes stated that the Commission should partner with the Friends of Open Spaces as well. Mr. Walton stated that watershed protection and health should also be discussed and the effects on the Ashuelot River. Chair Haynes asked how many parcels are city owned. Ms. Germond stated that the city owns approximately 60 parcels.

Mr. Lamb presented the Keene Master Plan to the Commission. Mr. Lamb stated that greenway connections section of the Master Plan and the Natural Resource Inventory from 2009 are relevant sections for the Commission to refer to in developing the Conservation Plan. Mr. Hansel stated that there is a lot of information to work with. Mr. Lamb stated that it is a high level plan but more detail would be needed. Chair Haynes asked if the Commission should use the maps to lump parcels together and determine areas to conduct natural resource inventories. Mr. Lacey pointed out that parcels are already close in proximity. Mr. Hansel stated that some parcels are also undeveloped.

Ms. Burchsted stated that the Commission's areas of focus should determine which parcels of land to prioritize. She continued, pointing out the Ashuelot River as an important corridor in the winter for wildlife. Mr. Lacey stated that both Goose Pond and Beech Hill should also be inventoried even though they are high traffic areas. Councilor Manwaring stated that putting Beech Hill under easement is also a possibility. Mr. Walton stated concern about focusing on details of the plan too quickly. Mr. Lacey stated that the Commission needs to jump in somewhere and the analysis may guide the direction. Chair Haynes asked if the Commission would like to determine specific parcels for analysis. Ms. Germond stated that looking at the larger parcels may be an option for the Commission. Mr. Lacey suggested hiring someone to conduct a thorough walk through of determined parcels to know what the landscape looks like. He continued, stating that a forester will be able to read perimeter lines and provide information.

Chair Haynes stated that the Commission needs to determine the level of detail for the plan. Councilor Manwaring asked if the land is currently being worked and if there are things that can be done on this land such as forestry that could make the City money. Mr. Lacey brought up the importance of determining potential recreational uses of the land as well. Councilor Manwaring stated that the Commission should determine if the main objective is education or conservation.

Mr. Lamb pointed out that the Comprehensive Master Plan is online for the Commission members to review. Mr. Hansel referred to Chair Haynes suggestion of Commission Members viewing specific parcels and looking over the Master Plan. Ms. Germond stated that she will send out the maps and details on the parcels to the Commission members. Chair Haynes stated that Commission Member's homework consisted of reviewing the documents being sent out.

Mr. Lamb stated that past Natural Resource Inventory plans can also be sent out for review as well. Ms. Burchsted suggested combining the smaller maps together. Ms. Germond stated that she will overlay another map to go over the current one. She continued, asking if any other resources should be reviewed. Ms. Burchsted stated that soil and agriculture are important factors.

#### **4. Reports from Commissions / Liaisons**

##### **a) SWPO SubCommission**

Mr. Walton stated that there has not been any further development .Mr. Lacey stated that that the sub-Commission is still interested in having a conversation with Public Works Director, Kurt Blomquist. Chair Haynes asked if it would be appropriate to have Mr. Blomquist attend the Conservation Commission. Mr. Lamb stated that he will inquire about Mr. Blomquist coming to the October Conservation Commission's meeting.

#### **5. Communications and Notifications**

##### **a) NH Association of Conservation Commissions membership**

Chair Haynes stated that the membership for the NH Association of Conservation Commissions (NHACC) is now \$817.00. Ms. Germond stated that there was an increase in membership. Chair Haynes stated that he will be going to the annual meeting and recommended that other Commission members attend. The group discussed the benefits of being a member of the NHACC and how the Commission has received services in the past.

Councilor Manwaring made a motion to renew the Conservation Commission's membership with the NHACC. Mr. Lacey seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

Mr. Hansel reminded the Commission to utilize this membership for the money being spent. Mr. Walton suggested emailing the director for sample conservation plans. Chair Haynes stated that they have conservation plans available online but they vary greatly.

##### **b) Source to Sea Cleanup**

Chair Haynes stated that this is an informational item if any Commission members would like to attend the event.

#### **6. Staff Updates**

##### **a) West Street Hydro**

Ms. Germond stated that VHB will have a product available by November. VHB is studying the potential impacts that would result from possible dam removal and other alternatives such as raising the dam to accommodate hydropower. Chair Haynes stated that the underlying theory was that free-flowing rivers are the best but it does not seem like there is enough information to determine the best solution yet. Ms. Germond also noted that West Street Hydro has received comments from stakeholders on their pre-application document to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

**b) Woodland Cemetery Wetland Restoration**

Ms. Germond stated that the City is currently trying to get a contract to treat the Japanese knotweed before removing the fill from the Woodland Cemetery. She continued, stating that the treatment should be done before the first frost. Mr. Walton asked about the process for treating the knotweed. Ms. Germond explained that it is best to spray the leaves after the plant has flowered and when the plant is pulling energy into the root system. She continued, stating that another course of treatment might need to occur in the spring.

Ms. Germond stated that the City is being cautious about where to bring the clean fill as well. She continued, stating that there have been cases of knotweed coming back after a few years. Mr. Hansel stated that this site has knotweed but up the road there is another section of it. He continued, asking why effort is being put into this one section if there is a possibility of the knotweed spreading again. Ms. Germond stated that the goal of the project is to remove the knotweed and bring the site back to the natural wetland habitat. They would be revegetating the area with wetland plant species and will be monitoring the site for the return of invasive plants for three years after the initial restoration project. Mr. Hansel asked how much it would cost for removal. Ms. Germond replied that it will cost about \$1,200 for treatment of the knotweed in the fall and spring and for the work to procure a permit in both instances.

Mr. Hansel asked who is asking for the removal of the knotweed. Ms. Germond stated that this was part of a grant condition and the concern was taking the fill and spreading the knotweed to another location.

**(c) New or Other Business**

Councilor Manwaring asked if Denise Burchsted is now an official member. Chair Haynes stated that the next step would be to have her write a letter to the Mayor if she is interested. Councilor Manwaring stated that Chair Haynes can also write the letter. Chair Haynes stated that he will await Ms. Burchsted's decision.

Ms. Burchsted told Commission members of a lecture occurring at Keene State College on October 5, 2015 from 7-9 PM called *The Power of Water, Power of Words* which brings awareness to the Connecticut River and the Dams that are in need of infrastructure repair.

**(d) Adjournment-next meeting date Monday, October 19, 2015**

Chair Haynes adjourned the meeting at 5:58 PM.

Respectfully submitted by:  
Lana C. Bluege, Minute-taker  
September 21, 2015

Edited by,  
Tara Germond, Planner  
October 16, 2015