

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, January 16, 2018

4:30 PM

2nd Floor Conference Room,
City Hall

Members Present:

Thomas Haynes, Chair
Brian Reilly
Eloise Clark, Alternate
Alexander Von Plinsky IV
Andrew Madison (Arrived at 5:30 PM)
Councilor George Hansel

Staff Present:

Tara Kessler, Planner

Members Not Present:

Denise Burchsted
Art Walker

1) Call to Order

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

2) Minutes – December 18, 2017

Councilor Hansel made a motion to accept the minutes of December 18, 2017, which was seconded by Mr. Von Plinsky and carried unanimously.

Chair Haynes recognized a matter not on the agenda. Councilor Hansel made a motion to reconsider the approved motion from the December 18, 2017 meeting that directed staff to send a letter to Council making them aware of the proposed West Street Dam research project, which was seconded by Chair Haynes.

Councilor Hansel said he has had conversations with staff since the December 18 meeting and it seems staff is taking the necessary actions and he does not think the letter to Council is necessary. He added the motion was not actually appropriate because this is an advisory Committee that does not have authority to direct staff to take such an action. He is confident the concerns of the Commission are going to be met internally.

Ms. Kessler said she has spoken with the Public Works Director, who is technically the owner of the dam, and he is aware that staff would like to proceed with the research

project. Staff believes there is adequate time within the West Street Hydro extension to coordinate with the researchers and take advantage of this opportunity. West Street Hydro is aware of this research project and staff has asked for their status update sooner rather than later to have a clearer direction moving forward. Staff does not see a conflict between pursuing this research project and the efforts of West Street Hydro.

Dr. Reilly asked a question about the Eversource discussion at the previous meeting. He asked if Eversource owns land within a certain distance from the center of each road. Ms. Kessler replied it depends and varies for each right of way; she can follow-up with more specific details. Dr. Reilly clarified he was unsure if some of the trees Eversource plans to cut are technically on City land or private property.

Chair Haynes recognized Ken Bergman who asked if the Eversource comment that abutters will be contacted applies to just scenic roads or all roads; he asked for clarification on who is notified. Chair Haynes said he believes it is just for the scenic roads because they have been given special designation; he believes they have the ability to trim as necessary on roads that do not have a special designation. Mr. Von Plinsky said the Commission does not review trimming on non-scenic roads but Eversource does still have to inform the land owner, who can still oppose the trimming. Dr. Bergman said it is unclear what the Eversource representative meant by abutters in their comments. The motion to reconsider the original motion to send a letter to Council informing them of the West Street Dam research project carried unanimously.

The motion to reconsider the original motion to send a letter to Council informing them of the West Street Dam research project carried unanimously.

3) Aquatic Resource Mitigation Subcommittee Update

Mr. Von Plinsky reported that he will be attending the aquatic resource management program hosted by NH DES and he hopes to gain more understanding of the easiest way for the Commission to continue working on this. Chair Haynes might also attend.

Chair Haynes said the subcommittee is still working on prioritizing projects.

4) Land Prioritization Criteria

Chair Haynes noted this effort began after it was realized the Commission could place conservation easements on City-owned property. The Commission was unsure what criteria to follow for designating these easements. Councilor Manwaring had developed a list of criteria other organizations use for making such decisions; this list was included in the meeting packet. Chair Haynes asked the Commission to use these resources to create criteria unique to Keene for evaluating City-owned land; he led the conversation based on the Monadnock Conservancy list of criteria because they have a lot of experience in this effort.

Chair Haynes listed six categories and asked the Commission to specific criteria in each category:

1. Water Resources
 - a. Chair Haynes suggested the Monadnock Conservancy criteria for this category are comprehensive and should be included:
 - i. Land overlying aquifers and aquifer recharge areas
 - ii. Frontage on rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and reservoirs
 - iii. Wetland, floodplains, buffer areas, and riparian zones
 - b. The Commission added the following criteria:
 - i. Emphasize riparian zones; make sure to have a clear definition of riparian zones. This may be defined in the Surface Water Protection Ordinance.
2. Forestry
 - a. Chair Haynes suggested including the following criteria from the Monadnock Conservancy:
 - i. Tracts of woodland with sufficient size, appropriate soils, and other attributes that support responsible forest management, including the production of timber and other forest products.
 - b. The Commission added the following criteria:
 - i. Steepness of slope; the Hillside Protection Ordinance
 - ii. Urban forestry (suggested by Charles Daloz of the Agricultural Commission)
 - iii. Un-fragmented forests (this issue of connectivity may fall under all of the categories)
 - iv. Need a better definition of “valuable forest tract”
3. Agriculture
 - a. Chair Haynes suggested including the following criteria from the Monadnock Conservancy:
 - i. Farmlands and open fields with prime soils and other attributes that support agriculture or have the potential to support agriculture.
 - b. The Commission added the following criteria:
 - i. Include non-prime soils; there may be sites that are good for agriculture in terms of exposure and size but the soils are no necessarily prime.
 - ii. Urban agricultural opportunities (suggested by Mr. Daloz)
4. Wildlife and Natural Areas
 - a. Chair Haynes suggested including the following criteria from the Monadnock Conservancy:
 - i. Large tracts of undeveloped habitat and corridors important for wildlife
 - ii. Land containing ecologically significant or rare natural communities or species
 - iii. Priority land as identified in the New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan

- iv. Other lands which increase the diversity and viability of wildlife populations, including fields, riparian areas, and land contiguous to existing protected natural areas
- b. The Commission added the following criteria:
 - i. Connectivity is important
 - ii. Priority lands identified in natural resource inventories
 - iii. Buffer between future development and valuable protected land; including landowner willingness (*this is more relevant to the Conservation Master Plan, whereas this list is specific to City-owned lands)
- 5. Cultural, Recreational, and Scenic Value
 - a. Chair Haynes suggested including the following criteria from the Monadnock Conservancy:
 - i. Land that offers opportunities for appropriate outdoor recreation by the public
 - ii. Scenic views, ridgelines, and other aesthetic areas
 - iii. Landscapes that preserve the region's cultural and historic heritage
 - b. The Commission added the following criteria:
 - i. Recreational connectivity
- 6. Other
 - a. Development pressure
 - b. Willing landowners
 - c. Connectivity
 - d. Opportunities on land at the transfer station or airport lands; look into lands owned by the City but not within the City boundaries
 - e. Regional partnerships

This list will be presented for adoption at the February meeting and the Commission will work to map/overlay City lands for potential conservation easements.

There will be a meeting with Ms. Clark, Chair Haynes, Dr. Reilly, Dr. Bergman, and Mr. Daloz to review potential areas of the City that meet the above criteria and are in need of protection. Ms. Kessler will coordinate a date and time for this meeting.

5) Conservation Master Plan Discussion

The group discussed the presentation made by Barbara Richter of the NH Association of Conservation Commissions at the December 2017 meeting. It was noted that Ms. Richter recommended the Commission began its master planning efforts by updating the Natural Resource Inventory (NRI) that was completed for the City in 2009. Dr. Reilly noted the level of detail needed for an initial NRI should already be available, as it would not be very granular. He suggested reviewing the NRI already developed for City lands to see the level of detail and types of data collected. Dr. Reilly will conduct this review, as he served on the Commission's NRI working group.

6) Membership Renewal

a. **Society for the Protection of NH Forests**

Ms. Kessler shared a letter from the Society for the Protection of NH Forests (SPNHF) requesting renewal of the Commission's annual membership. The letter does not include information about cost of membership. Ms. Kessler reviewed the SPNHF website and learned that membership ranges from \$40 per year to \$1,000+ per year. She will collect information on the amount the Commission has contributed for annual membership in the past and present this at the next meeting. The Commission agreed to postpone a vote on this item until more information is obtained.

b. **NH Association of Conservation Commission**

Ms. Kessler notified the Commission that they have \$408 remaining in their annual budget. The annual membership for NH Association of Conservation Commissions is \$817 and was deducted from the budget.

7) **Staff Updates**

No updates were provided at this meeting.

8) **New or Other Business**

9) **Adjournment – Next meeting date Tuesday, February 20, 2018**

Hearing no further business, Chair Haynes adjourned the meeting at 5:37 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker

Reviewed and Edited by, Tara Kessler, Planner