

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

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

**Monday, October 18, 2021**

**4:30 PM**

**Council Chambers,  
City Hall/via Zoom**

**Members Present:**

Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Chair  
Eloise Clark, Vice Chair  
Councilor Robert Williams  
Councilor Andrew Madison  
Art Walker  
Ken Bergman  
Thomas Haynes, Alternate  
Steven Bill, Alternate (Arrived Late)  
John Therriault, Alternate

**Staff Present:**

Rhett Lamb, Community Development  
Director/Assistant City Manager  
Corinne Marcou, Administrative Assistant

**Members Not Present:**

Brian Reilly, Alternate

**1) Call to Order**

Chair Von Plinsky called the meeting to order at 4:31 PM.

**2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – September 20, 2021**

Councilor Madison moved to approve the minutes of the September 20, 2021 meeting, which Mr. Bergman seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

**3) Applications**

**A) Planning Board Referral – Surface Water Protection Conditional Use Permit Application – Eversource**

Mr. Lamb introduced the application that was referred to the Conservation Commission for comments by the Planning Board as a part of the Surface Water Protection Ordinance process required for Conditional Use Permits. This is like other Eversource submissions for transmission line pole replacement projects. He introduced Lindsey White of GZA Geoenvironmental and Ashley Ruprecht of Eversource.

Ms. White described the upcoming pole replacement project on the W-110 distribution line. Eversource seeks to replace two existing poles (#178 and #179) that were found to have defects, as is normal, and so they should be replaced. Access is proposed from an existing driveway off Chesterfield Road and then through an existing breach in a stonewall that crews would utilize. The buffer would be off the wetland and crews would look to do temporary impacts in the buffer and temporary impacts in the wetland using timber matting to avoid wetland compaction. Similar to applications past in the buffer, the proposal is to do full restoration for any impacts. Work is proposed later this fall of 2021 under more favorable conditions, and access will require those temporary impact to the Surface Water Protection District. Ms. White and Ms. Ruprecht attended the pre-submission meeting on September 8 and no concerns arose through the Planning Board, so no revised application or plans were submitted.

Chair Von Plinsky visited the site and was glad it was only those two poles and not others further up the line, for which he would be concerned about impacts traversing the wetland. He saw no problems.

Mr. Therriault noted that there would not be much time left in growing season when the restoration is planned. Ms. White said the area would be stabilized at that point. Ms. Ruprecht said seeds would be placed and they would check back in the spring to ensure regrowth. The Chairman asked if it was standard procedure to check after the winter season. Ms. Ruprecht said that is the hope. Mr. Therriault asked what the seed mix is. Ms. White said that it is the standard wetland seed mix. Ms. Ruprecht said that in wetlands, it is usually from NE Wetland Plants Inc. of MA that uses native seed mixes, and in the buffer and upland areas, it is usually a wildflower mix, but Ms. Ruprecht said that if those are out of stock there are other options with similar species to not limit contractors to a particular brand. Mr. Therriault was interested in reviewing the intended seed mix. As a Bee City USA, the Chairman urged the use of a native pollinator species friendly seed mix regardless of the type. Ms. White said the typical wildflower mix they use on other projects meets that requirement. Ms. White will forward the seed mix specifications.

Mr. Bill asked how long the project would take once started. Ms. Ruprecht replied a few weeks. Mr. Bill asked if there would be geotechnical material under the gravel placed for machinery travel through the area. Ms. Ruprecht said there would be no material under the gravel, which would not be placed within the wetland or the buffer. When inventorying rare things in the project area, Mr. Bill asked whether that included plant species. Ms. Ruprecht replied in the affirmative, stating that they use the National Heritage Bureau data checklist of rare, threatened, and endangered plants and animals. Ms. White said the State Wetland Permit application for this project was approved already, which is a statutory permit by notification (NHDES File #2020-03226).

Mr. Bergman noted that the application refers to a potential vernal pool in the area. When the applicants check on the regrowth in the spring, he asked whether they could check for verification of the pool. Ms. White said that vernal pool season is April—June, so it depends on the timing. Ms. Ruprecht said that GZA Geoenvironmental is not responsible for the restoration

work, so the vernal pool is not in their purview. Mr. Bergman asked if this was a right-of-way on private property and Ms. Ruprecht said there is an underlying property owner and Eversource has an easement on the property.

The Chairman thanked Ms. White and Ms. Ruprecht for their presentation and the Commission would await the seed mix details. The Commission recommendation would be presented to the Planning Board at their October 25 meeting.

The Chairman moved to recommend that the Planning Board ask the applicant to provide the seed mix information and that it be native pollinator friendly, which Councilor Madison seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

**4) Informational**

**A) Subcommittee Reports**

**i) *Outreach Subcommittee***

The Subcommittee did not meet during the previous month, but they hope to in November. The group would be attending Mr. Bill's guided walk at Goose Pond on Saturday, October 23. Vice Chair Clark reported that she continues sending Nature Nuggets to Ms. Marcou and Mr. Bohannon. She has been taking a different approach by walking City properties and natural sites and interpreting them so people can use the Nuggets as a self-guided nature walk. She would also attend Mr. Bill's tour and create a Nature Nugget about it. She has done some in Robin Hood Park already. The Chairman's friends in other city planning departments are intrigued by the Nature Nuggets and the idea is spreading in New England.

**ii) *ARM Fund Subcommittee***

The Chairman recalled that this Subcommittee had not met in some time and there was nothing to report. Mr. Bergman asked if there was news from the Monadnock Conservancy and the Chairman said he spoke with them, and they said to "hold tight". He said that could be interpreted in different ways and he left it at that for the time being.

**iii) *Greater Goose Pond Stewardship Committee***

Mr. Haynes reported that the Subcommittee met on October 8, and they have been honing priorities to move forward. He said that unsurprisingly, trails and accompanying signage, kiosks, etc., arose as the highest priorities and would be the Subcommittee's initial focus, with a goal to present a plan to Parks and Recreation by mid-winter to begin looking for funding and hopefully start implementation in summer of 2022. The Subcommittee is currently reviewing the extensive trails section in the Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Plan to help guide this process and identifying work priorities. The Subcommittee would meet next on Friday, November 12 at 8:30 AM in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Conference Room at City Hall.

Mr. Lamb added that this is also the time when Departments are working on their Capital Improvement Plans (CIP) and the Subcommittee's work is being reflected in proposals from Mr. Bohannon's office for trail kiosks, etc., which could begin the grants-seeking process. He wanted the Commission to know that Staff is trying to move as much as they can that would turn into a list of City investments in trails improvements into the CIP, so they get further discussion before City Council and otherwise.

5) **Discussion Items**

A) **Invasive Species – See-Click-Fix**

The Chairman thanked Councilor Williams for leading the Japanese knotweed pull in Robin Hood Park on October 11. The Chairman was grateful to the City for hauling away the 15 full bags collected. He recalled that knotweed often requires more than one pull, but said there were great efforts pulling the whole root systems to avoid regrowth. He said it was a good time and that the invasives volunteers are increasing. Councilor Williams said there was interest in another event in November and he suggested Veterans Day, Monday, November 11 but he had yet to scout a location or species of focus; his concern with glossy buckthorn was growing and there is a lot around Wheelock Park. He said there was a lot of Japanese barberries identified during the knotweed pull as well. He will scout the next location and share the details with the Commission via Ms. Marcou.

At the last meeting, Mr. Bergman initiated the concept of tracking invasive species locations reported by the public on City-owned lands with the See-Click-Fix app. The app turns public-reported concerns (with locations and/or photos) into Public Works Department or Parks and Recreation work orders that are often resolved within 48 hours in his experience (such as a vandalized memorial bench he reported recently), depending on the severity. Mr. Lamb recalled that the question was how to add these invasive sightings to See-Click-Fix without alerting the Public Works Department or Parks and Recreation Staff to act. He said the Public Works Department was amenable to this idea and these invasive locations would be documented as an item and location in their database for future reporting purposes (like a bench), while leaving it out of the work order response process. The Commission would be able to access these details periodically or biannually/annual. The Public Works Department is working-out the final details but there was no reason to delay the process and Mr. Lamb would report back with a kickoff date hopefully by the next meeting.

The Chairman was excited with this news, which would make scouting locations for future invasive pulls much easier. Mr. Bergman uses the app regularly but still has some challenges with pinning an exact location or he cannot upload a photo until he is back home; some parts are confusing, and he asked for Staff guidance, especially on how to properly report invasive species. Mr. Lamb thought it was a good observation and that someone from the Public Works Department could easily come and demonstrate the app. He agreed that locations can be challenging sometimes because the app is built on a database of addresses, and it might be hard to specify somewhere on a trail. Mr. Bergman wondered if the system logged photo geotag data

and Mr. Lamb was unsure. Mr. Bergman asked if this was limited to public property. Mr. Lamb did not have a specific answer but said that any time private property is under discussion, it must be at minimum viewed from the public right-of-way; it is inappropriate to walk on any private property to document these things, but Mr. Lamb thought that things seen from the right-of-way could be reported and the response would be different. The Chairman thought this was comparable to reporting a downed power line you see on someone's property from the right-of-way. Mr. Lamb does not want this to turn into a public shaming tool and suggested that if Commissioners have neighbors with invasives in their yards, for example, that they call and talk to them. He also does not want the public to feel like they might be on a collected list and he thinks this is a better solution for public invasive species locations.

Councilor Williams thought this could act as an early warning system for species like Japanese stiltgrass, which he hopes to mitigate early if it arrives in Keene. The Chairman thinks the trick will be word of mouth to qualified individuals for reliable observations and reporting.

### **B) Summit Road/Summit Ridge Drive Ponding**

Mr. Bergman recalled this topic he initiated at the last meeting. He said that Summit Ridge Drive connects Summit Road (in west Keene roughly parallel to RT-12) with Skyline Drive, which he said was an approximately 30-year-old residential neighborhood, and there are hills further to the west. He said that all this area drains through a property now owned by C & S Wholesale Grocers. He has noticed over the last few years that if leaving Summit Road and turning left heading westward that within 100 yards, there is a pond on the left with various ducks and waterfowl; at times and on the right, where it seemed to be draining, there was a small brook. He did not see any sedges at the brook though there might have been and he was unsure whether there was wetland vegetation; it was like a small grassy meadow with a small brook running through it. He said that the roadway floods when it rains with some frequency and at times with quite deep water. He did not remember this being the case many years ago, so he was curious, knowing there would not have been permitting for a paved road in a wetland without special exemption, and he hoped to learn the history. Then he encountered a crew of many City of Keene vehicles at the site approximately one week before this meeting with heavy equipment and the pond was drained by a pump; leaving a muddy bottom. He spoke to the foreman, who showed Mr. Bergman around and said they did not believe it was a wetland before the road was constructed but that drainage was progressively blocked from going into the culvert under Summit Road to the east, and water was building during rainstorms and breaching the road to another property across Summit Ridge Drive. He saw them creating a drainage channel in the low area to carry water to the culvert under Summit Road in a lower area. The foreman was hopeful this would fix the problem.

Mr. Lamb said that Mr. Bergman accurately described the situation. Mr. Lamb was not yet able to contact the City Engineer and was unaware of this ongoing work. He said this had been an issue long enough that the road is deteriorating, as is the culvert under the roadway meant to carry drainage to Dickinson Brook. However, Mr. Lamb said the obstruction is on private

property and so the City has no control over fixing blockages. He was unaware the current solution Mr. Bergman described had been reached. He said this was likely a part of the former tax ditch system that collected agricultural drainage. In the past, the City worked with property owners' permission on the side of the road Mr. Bergman observed to remove beaver dams, but that this was not the same; in this case, there appeared to be an accumulation of sediment over time so the drain way could not work as intended. He said the roadway was built with a culvert crossing over a stream that he assumes that was accomplished with proper wetland permitting, though it might not have come through the Conservation Commission process if it were a maintenance issue. Mr. Lamb offered to follow-up and get more details before the next meeting, which the Chairman requested. Mr. Lamb will have more information at the next meeting. The Chairman asked the standard right-of-way width on City roads like this one. Mr. Lamb said the modern standard for residential streets it is 50'—55' but on older roads as narrow as 32.5 feet.

Mr. Bergman said the work to fix the issue he observed was extensive. Mr. Bergman recalled the person he understood to be the foreman saying it was private property and he was unsure why the work was occurring but that there had been no objections.

**6) New or Other Business**

Vice Chair Clark reminded everyone that the NH Association of Conservation Commissions annual meeting would be November 6 via Zoom. The cost for Commissioners to attend is \$35 and in the past the Commission budget has paid for members to attend, which she assumed would be the case again, and the Chairman confirmed. Members should alert Ms. Marcou if they want to attend. Vice Chair Clark said that past meetings have been very informative on various topics.

Vice Chair Clark provided an update on the Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee's (ARLAC) revised Corridor Management Plan. Henry Underwood of Southwest Regional Planning Commission created a citizen science app with a view of the corridor. Her fellow ARLAC Keene representative, Jim Holly, found a discouraging amount of invasives in the corridor from the Surry town line at the golf course to Cheshire Medical Center, including an understory of glossy buckthorn throughout. She suggested that Councilor Williams contact the Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board about pulling glossy buckthorn in the area. The Chairman asked if the app is open to the public so the Commission could spread the word; the Vice Chair would find out. Vice Chair Clark hopes to have all data by the November meeting. Lisa Murphy from the Southwest Regional Planning Commission is writing the plan. Mr. Bill asked about erosion issues identified and the Vice Chair said there were no significant problems observed beyond the natural erosion process.

Mr. Bergman recalled workshops a few years ago on options for the West Street Dam and wondered if there was an update. Mr. Lamb did not have an update but could present it at the next meeting. The Chairman said that at some point, the dam would make the decision and hopefully it was not yet at that point. Mr. Lamb said the City had repaired almost all dams the

State ordered letters of deficiency on and since the West Street dam is low hazard, the City had not heard from the State in a while about it.

7) **Adjournment – Next Meeting Date: Monday, November 15, 2021**

The Chairman would not be present at the November meeting and the Vice Chair would act as Chair. There being no further business, Chair Von Plinsky adjourned the meeting at 5:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker  
October 21, 2021

Reviewed and edited by,  
Corinne Marcou, Administrative Assistant  
October 21, 2021

Reviewed and edited by,  
Rhett Lamb, ACM/Community Development Dir.  
November 8, 2021