

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, October 17, 2022

4:30 PM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Chair
Eloise Clark
Councilor Robert Williams
Art Walker
Ken Bergman
Thomas Haynes, Alternate
Steven Bill, Alternate (Via Zoom; non-voting)
John Therriault, Alternate
Brian Reilly, Alternate (Arrived Late)

Staff Present:

Corinne Marcou, Administrative Assistant

Members Not Present:

Councilor Andrew Madison, Vice Chair

1) Call to Order

Chair Von Plinsky called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM. Mr. Bill stated his location and that he was alone there.

2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – September 19, 2022

Ms. Clark echoed edits of typos submitted via email that would be corrected by Staff.

A motion by Mr. Therriault to approve the September 19, 2022 meeting minutes as amended was duly seconded by Ms. Clark and the motion carried unanimously.

3) Report-Outs

A) Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Committee

Mr. Haynes reported that the group would meet again on October 21. The Recreation Trails Grant they applied for was not awarded due to too many projects and insufficient funds, so they were disappointed. There is potential money through the Parks and Recreation Trails budget for that project.

B) Outreach

This group had not met recently. Mr. Haynes thanked Mr. Bill for leading the geology walk at Robin Hood Park on October 14 and Ms. Clark for her assistance. There were 18 participants, including some children. Chair Von Plinsky said he saw some of Ms. Clark's beautiful photos that the Director of Parks and Recreation, Andy Bohannon, would post on the Department's social media. There was a scheduled walk at the end of October to be led by Jeff Littleton, but he had not corresponded with Mr. Haynes in weeks, and so the event would likely be canceled.

C) Invasive Species

Councilor Williams recalled the event at Robin Hood Park on Indigenous Peoples' Day, October 12, with good participation of 9–10 people. They pulled a lot of Japanese knotweed from the same location as last year where it had grown back, as well as some Japanese barberry. They will address the knotweed again next year to hopefully get it under control. The area could benefit from some shrub transplants if any Commissioners have donations.

The next event is on Veteran's Day at 4:00 PM, where the Rail Trail meets Eastern Avenue, proceeding up the trail toward town. There are a lot of invasives on that trail and Councilor Williams was disheartened with what had grown back since last year.

Councilor Williams continued noting that part of the construction at the new Russell Park included removing a significant portion of knotweed on the far side of Beaver Brook. They planted some native replacement shrubs, and he hopes they do well, but there is some knotweed coming back through them, which the City would need to keep an eye on.

Mr. Bill asked whether to bring any tools on Veteran's Day. Councilor Williams said clippers are best and suggested tools that remove roots, but no power tools. If any Commissioners have shrubs from their gardens for replanting—either along Eastern Avenue or in the cemetery where they addressed knotweed in June—they should contact Councilor Williams. Mr. Bill asked whether mulching would help, and the Councilor said not for knotweed; black plastic would work but that has environmental implications.

Mr. Therriault asked whether milkweed would work as a replacement. Councilor Williams said he tried milkweed seeds last year at Robin Hood Park and said they were hit or miss. Mr. Therriault was transporting milkweed, which he said if left on the ground, would be packed down by the snow for germination in the spring. If there were a better propagation process, Councilor Williams welcomed it because it can compete with nastier weeds. Mr. Therriault, Mr. Haynes, and Mr. Bill could all contribute some.

4) Discussion Items

A) Conservation Commission Speaking Events

In Vice Chair Madison's absence, the Chair said he wanted himself and the Vice Chair to meet with the Outreach working group, to milk their enthusiasm and seek their assistance to come up with the first speaking event. Mr. Haynes said the next meeting would be in November, and the Chair asked to be included if there is room in their schedule.

B) Airport Proposed Wildlife Control Fences

The Chair kept this as a placeholder. Mr. Bergman had not recently spoken with Airport Director David Hickling, and there were no recent minutes on the website for the Airport Development and Marketing Committee. They do have the land use planning project but that is different than the fencing. Mr. Bergman still thought it useful to invite Mr. Hickling to a future meeting, which the Chair agreed to prioritize so the whole Commission can ask him questions.

C) Budget Planning

Chair Von Plinsky reviewed the funds earmarked for the upcoming year at last month's meeting:

- 1) \$1,000 for dues to Bee City, ARLAC, and NHACC, and occasionally others like the Forest Society
- 2) \$600 for outreach speakers
- 3) \$100 for invasive species project needs
- 4) \$300 for discretionary funds

The Commission had no additions or corrections.

D) 30x30 Program

Mr. Bill pointed this out at the last meeting. The goal is to conserve 30% of land nationally—or 30% of Keene—by 2030. His approximation is that Keene is 15–20% conserved, but he did not know how to confirm that figure. There are a lot of Zoning and easement differences within those conserved lands. The Chair suggested a working group to focus on this. Mr. Bill suggested the working group could begin discussing the important nature of the habitats and the minimum property sizes. He also suggested follow-up on the Surry Mountain wildlife corridor they heard about from the Monadnock Conservancy. He said there was also a wetland above Beaver Brook Falls that stretches RT-10 into Gilsum and he did not know its protection status. Mr. Bergman said two major concepts are islands of habitat and habitat corridors, which are more restrictive but provide critical connections. He thinks the Ashuelot Riverbanks serve as valuable habitats. Ms. Clark thought it sounded like a reprisal of the land protection committee. Mr. Bill, Mr. Bergman, and the Chair agreed to meet on November 10.

E) Downtown Tree Inventory

Mr. Haynes said he followed-up with Director Bohannon but had not heard back on the inventory; he would follow-up again this week. Mr. Bergman thought it was important to start modestly and with priorities to do some triage. He cited some practical applications. Mr. Bergman would share links to some other cities. He was unsure the City would see it as a valuable asset. Lands and rights-of-way would have to be defined and prioritized so it is less overwhelming. Mr. Bergman noted the tree inventory done by Keene State College, done by Bartlett Tree Service from Connecticut, for which now all the trees have a QR code tag. He further noted the high cost associated with any mature tree replacement that may be required during construction projects as he was provided quotes from Bartlett Tree Service. Mr. Bergman thought the City had done a good job with the spread of tree diseases as well as tree replacement within the rights-of-ways, but also recognized the cost of conducting an inventory. The Chair said it was worth looking into, noting the Keene State inventory, the Ashuelot River Park inventory, and the Main Street inventory, so perhaps this could be a citizen science initiative as outreach. Mr. Bergman said there were other issues of utility tree pruning and removal that the Commission is not always notified.

Mr. Bill asked about contacting someone from Brattleboro who may be involved with their inventory, to not reinvent the wheel, possibly inviting someone to a future meeting. Mr. Bergman said their inventory was a few years ago but it is maintained and used in City planning.

Mr. Reilly suggested that Antioch University might have students in urban forestry looking for such a study. Mr. Bergman said that for students and advisors to take that on it would require some scientific application of value.

F) Photo Library

Chair Von Plinsky recalled that Ms. Brunner said this might not be too complicated and could be as simple as a Google drive folder. He would follow-up with Ms. Brunner. Mr. Bergman noted that organization would be important.

5) New or Other Business

Ms. Clark announced the opportunity to be a Keene representative to the Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee. Interested individuals could attend a 7:00 PM meeting on October 18 in person or via Zoom. Generally, their meetings cover all shoreland and wetland permitting processes up and down the 60-mile corridor. The group also makes comments on developments. In addition, they have various watershed projects such as the Source to Sea Clean-Up and the May–September river monitoring, which this Commission funds partially. There is also now a corridor management plan. The commitment is 7:00–9:00 PM on the third Tuesday of the month in person at Green Energy Options or via Zoom as long as a quorum is present in person. If interested, let Ms. Clark know and she would share the Zoom link.

Mr. Therriault recalled Ms. Clark asking about the pollinator garden at the Monadnock View Cemetery. He shared photos with Ms. Clark and discussed the need to have a conversation with the Parks Director in the spring to lay black plastic to solarize the grass before planting more pollinator flowers.

Chair Von Plinsky recalled that in December, the Commission votes for a Chair and Vice Chair for the forthcoming year. He would like to focus on the 30x30 idea, and would not accept another nomination for Chair. He asked others to begin considering whether they would like to serve.

6) Adjournment – Next Meeting Date: Monday, November 21, 2022

There being no further business, Chair Von Plinsky adjourned the meeting at 5:11 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker
October 20, 2022

Reviewed and edited by,
Corinne Marcou, Administrative Assistant