



CONSERVATION COMMISSION

AGENDA

Monday, November 20, 2023

4:30 PM

Room 22, Recreation Center

Commission Members

Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Chair
Councilor Andrew Madison, Vice Chair
Art Walker
Councilor Robert Williams, Ex-Officio
Eloise Clark
Steven Bill
Kenneth Bergman

Deborah LeBlanc, Alternate
Thomas P. Haynes, Alternate
John Therriault, Alternate
Brian Reilly, Alternate
Lee Stanish, Alternate

1. Call to Order
2. Approval of Meeting Minutes – October 16, 2023
3. Report-outs
 - 1) Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Subcommittee
 - 2) Outreach
 - 3) Invasive Species
 - 4) Land Conservation
4. NH Association of Conservation Commissions (NHACC) Annual Meeting & Conference Debrief
5. Discussion Items:
 - a) Discussion re: proposed recommendations for urban forest management
 - b) Keene Meadow Solar Station project update.
 - c) Potential Land Purchase Update (Rt 9/Washington St. Ext. properties).
 - d) Airport proposed wildlife control fence update.
 - e) Neighborhood Pollinator Garden update
 - f) Antioch University CSI proposal
 - g) NHDOT Route 101 Project
 - h) Commission Membership
6. New or Other Business
7. Adjourn – Next meeting date: **Monday, December 18, 2023**

1 City of Keene
2 New Hampshire

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5 CONSERVATION COMMISSION
6 MEETING MINUTES
7

Monday, October 16, 2023

4:30 PM

Room 22,
Recreation Center

Members Present:

Alexander Von Plinsky, IV, Chair
Councilor Andrew Madison, Vice Chair (4:35 PM)
Eloise Clark
Art Walker
Ken Bergman
Steven Bill
Thomas Haynes, Alternate (Voting)
Lee Stanish, Alternate (4:32 PM)
Deborah LeBlanc, Alternate (Voting)

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner

Members Not Present:

Councilor Robert Williams
Brian Reilly, Alternate
John Therriault, Alternate

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10 **1) Call to Order**

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12 Chair Von Plinsky called the meeting to order at 4:31 PM and roll call ensued.

13
14 **2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – September 18, 2023**

15
16 Revisions: line 29, change “trail signs” to “trail maps.” Lines 114–115, delete “of Hull Forest
17 Products.”

18
19 A motion by Mr. Walker to approve the September 18, 2023 minutes as amended was duly
20 seconded by Mr. Bergman. The motion carried unanimously.

21
22 **3) Report-Outs**

23 **A) Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Subcommittee**

24
25 Mr. Haynes reported that the Subcommittee’s next meeting would be on Friday, October 20, at
26 8:30 AM in the Recreation Center, room 22. Ms. Brunner would follow-up to see if this meeting
27 needs to be publicly noticed. Mr. Haynes said the trail looked good now that the leaves were

28 changing colors and falling, hiding some of the construction work that had occurred. During the
29 prior month, an old boardwalk was completely removed on the east side of the trail, which is a
30 lower trail along the pond that the Subcommittee hopes will restore itself. While the lower trail is
31 harder to maintain (e.g., water issues) users still seem to want to use it, though all users are
32 encouraged to use the new trail that is on the hillside above this one. Mr. Haynes said the
33 Subcommittee had a few more projects that they wanted to complete before winter. Mr. Bergman
34 noted that he had visited Goose Pond since the last meeting and he commended the great
35 improvements to signage, trail routing, boardwalks, bridges, and more. He felt it was much
36 easier to use now.

37

38 **B) Outreach**

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40 Mr. Haynes announced that Mr. Bill offered to lead a geology walk at Goose Pond this fall.
41 Because of the NH Association of Conservation Commissions annual meeting on November 4,
42 Mr. Bill was okay with leading this walk on November 11, beginning at the north trailhead at
43 10:00 AM. Mr. Bill would lead the walk in the opposite direction of his last walk so the group
44 could see new things. He requested that there be a way for participants to sign-up in advance, so
45 he knows what to anticipate.

46

47 Chair Von Plinsky recalled that Mr. Haynes needed to step back from leading this work group.
48 Mr. Haynes said it does not require a lot of work. He recalled possible activities, like Councilor
49 Madison's ideas for speaking events and Ms. Clark's Tap to Toilet idea, the latter of which never
50 occurred due to the pandemic. There had also been an event planned with Jim Rousmaniere, but
51 unfortunately, he passed away.

52

53 Chair Von Plinsky asked if anyone was interested in leading the Outreach work group. Mr.
54 Haynes said it is not a lot of work. Ms. LeBlanc said she wanted to be involved but felt like she
55 needed someone to mentor her as she learns the role. She asked who else was in the work group,
56 and Mr. Haynes said it had been him, Ms. Clark, Mr. Reilly, and more recently, Ms. Stanish
57 helped with one project. Mr. Haynes noted that a work group with 3 members is easier, as 4
58 members constitutes a Conservation Commission quorum, for which there would need to be
59 public notice and public minutes (while City minute takers are trained in the law, etc., that does
60 not preclude a Commissioner possibly learning to document those proceedings if needed). Mr.
61 Haynes was happy to help Ms. LeBlanc get started. Chair Von Plinsky suggested that Ms.
62 LeBlanc compile her questions and the Commission would work to formalize this next month.

63

64 In response to Mr. Bergman's question about sharing outreach ideas via email, Ms. Brunner
65 notified the Commission that no business should be conducted via email, as using the "reply all"
66 function constitutes a quorum of the Commission without public notice (required 24 hours in
67 advance in 2 physical locations), per NH RSA 91-A. If the work group is unable to meet
68 monthly, outreach ideas could be discussed during the regular Commission meetings.

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70 The Commissioners agreed to continue this conversation at the November meeting.

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C) Invasive Species

Councilor Williams was not present to report. Mr. Haynes recalled that on October 9, volunteers cut and stacked some bittersweet at the entryway off Eastern Avenue, in an effort to keep that invasive species away from the bike path.

D) Land Conservation

The work group had not met.

4) NH Association of Conservation Commissions: Request for Annual Dues & Invitation to Annual Meeting & Conference on November 4, 2023

Chair Von Plinsky noted that the NH Association of Conservation Commissions (NHACC) would be holding its annual meeting/conference on Saturday, November 4, at the Pembroke Academy. The Conservation Commission’s budget could be used to pay the registration fees for anyone who wanted to attend. Ms. Clark and Mr. Haynes agreed that it is very worth attending. There was a discounted fee (\$60) for early registration by October 27. The Commission requested that anyone who attends report back to the Commission afterward. Ms. LeBlanc, Ms. Stanish, Mr. Bill, and Mr. Bergman were interested in attending.

A motion by Mr. Haynes for the Conservation Commission to pay for up to 4 Keene Conservation Commissioners to attend the NH Association of Conservation Commissions Annual Meeting & Conference on November 4, 2023, was duly seconded by Councilor Madison. The motion carried unanimously.

Chair Von Plinsky also noted that the NHACC requested its annual dues of \$950, which the Commission had generally paid for (or in part) in the past.

A motion by Councilor Madison for the Conservation Commission to approve paying the annual NH Association of Conservation Commissions dues of \$950 was duly seconded by Mr. Walker. The motion carried unanimously.

Chair Von Plinsky noted that the NHACC is active in tracking relevant bills in Concord, like some last year on wetland buffer rules, for example. While these dues would use approximately half of the Commission’s budget, he thought it was a good way to spend those funds. Mr. Bill said the NHACC also sends out emails on recent legislation. Ms. Clark added that the NHACC provides excellent online classes during lunchtime that are free to Commissioners. Councilor Madison said the NHACC also provides education, outreach, and technical guidance to Commissions; they also published a handbook.

114 5) **Discussion Items**

115 A) **Keene Meadow Solar Station Project Update**

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117 Chair Von Plinsky and Councilor Madison had not heard any updates on this.

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119 B) **Potential Land Purchase Update (Rt-9/Washington St. Ext.)**

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121 Councilor Madison said there was no update on this from the City Manager and his
122 understanding was that the City had not changed its position. Chair Von Plinsky recalled that
123 Hull Forest Products wanted \$150,000 for both properties together. Last month, the Commission
124 discussed options. Mr. Haynes offered to talk with the Director of Parks, Recreation, &
125 Facilities, Andy Bohannon, on October 20 to determine if the City would have greater interest in
126 purchasing only one of the parcels; he would report back at the November meeting. If the
127 Commission supported purchasing one parcel over the other, Chair Von Plinsky wondered which
128 the Commission would choose and how to make that decision.

129
130 Ms. Clark recalled that the City is obligated to not pay more than the value of the land.

131 Councilor Madison agreed that City Council authorized the City Manager to spend up to a
132 certain amount and anything over that would require a new motion. Ms. Clark thought that was
133 NH law. Councilor Madison agreed that the municipality cannot pay more than the assessed
134 value.

135
136 Mr. Bergman reiterated his perspective that the steep slopes and rocky nature of the Washington
137 Street Extension property would make it far less likely to be developed, but the City might be
138 able to create recreation opportunities there. Conversely, he thought the other, larger property is
139 much more valuable for wildlife habitat.

140
141 Mr. Bill mentioned some properties on Court Street, across from the hospital, where the hillside
142 was developed. There is another 9.6-acre property near the hospital that is on a hillside, and he
143 cited many other properties on hillsides being developed. Mr. Bill was unsure that there was a
144 strong precedent of properties on hillsides being undevelopable or undesirable. Mr. Bergman
145 thought there was a maximum slope limit for developments. Chair Von Plinsky added that in
146 some situations, only part of a property is undevelopable because of steep slopes.

147
148 Mr. Haynes said he would talk with Mr. Bohannon about this, and Councilor Madison agreed to
149 follow-up with the City Manager. The Chair thought that with a little more information, the
150 Commission would be better prepared to discuss this in November and consider prioritizing one
151 of the parcels with a formal vote.

152
153 Mr. Bergman wondered if it was appropriate to ask the Monadnock Conservancy whether they
154 had appraised wildlife or conservation value of those two parcels, especially the one to the north
155 of the highway. Ms. Clark said all of those details were available in the NH Wildlife Action Plan.

156 Mr. Bergman wondered if supporting another entity purchasing one or both of these parcels
157 could be another way forward.

158

159 **C) Airport Proposed Wildlife Control Fence Update**

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161 This project was in the grant stage and the Airport Director would report to the Commission
162 when there is new progress.

163

164 **D) Conservation Commission Speaking Events**

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166 Councilor Madison had nothing to report.

167

168 **E) Wantastiquet-Monadnock Coalition – Request for Commission Assistance**
169 **with Construction of a Bathroom Along the Wantastiquet-Monadnock Trail**

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171 Chair Von Plinsky recalled that the Wantastiquet-Monadnock Coalition requested the
172 Commission’s help to build a campsite and privy on the south side of the Horatio Colony Nature
173 Preserve. They requested money, time, or both. He was told that \$700 in supplies were needed
174 for the site and privy. Given that this part of the Wantastiquet-Monadnock Trail goes through
175 Keene, the Chair thought it was reasonable for the Commission to donate to that effort.

176

177 Chair Von Plinsky recalled that the Commission has a \$2,000 annual budget. This donation (if
178 \$200) and the NHACC dues would leave the Commission with \$1,050 (not including the
179 NHACC Conference registration fees). There was a question of whether certain past outreach
180 events were paid for already. Ms. Brunner said she checked, and those honorariums were paid
181 for with last year’s budget. The Commission would also have upcoming requests, which the
182 Commission paid in the past: Bee City USA dues (approximately \$200) and the Ashuelot River
183 Local Advisory Committee’s E. coli testing (\$125 request in the past).

184

185 A motion by Chair Von Plinsky to donate \$200 to the Wantastiquet-Monadnock Coalition for
186 building a privy on the Horatio Colony Nature Preserve site was duly seconded by Ms. LeBlanc.
187 The motion carried unanimously.

188

189 Mr. Haynes asked about the timeline for constructing this site. Ms. LeBlanc said that trail work
190 had been scheduled for the same day as this meeting but was canceled due to weather conditions.
191 The next workday was planned for Tuesday, October 24, beginning at the Horatio Colony Nature
192 Preserve parking lot at 9:00 AM; labor and equipment were welcome. Anyone else interested in
193 attending should let Ms. LeBlanc know. Councilor Madison said it might be useful to have
194 another workday on the weekend when more volunteers might be available. The Commission
195 thanked Ms. LeBlanc for her attention to this effort.

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199 **F) Neighborhood Pollinator Garden Update**
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201 Mr. Therriault was not present to report on this. Chair Von Plinsky recalled the request from the
202 Edgewood neighborhood (south of the cemetery off RT-12, near the airport) to plant a pollinator
203 garden. Mr. Haynes had spoken to one of the neighbors, who said the effort was progressing.
204 Chair Von Plinsky would check-in with Mr. Therriault for an update.
205

206 **G) Antioch University CSI Proposal**
207

208 Ms. Brunner said that the Commission missed the opportunity to submit an Antioch University
209 New England Community Service Initiative (CSI) proposal. After a conversation with Mr.
210 Bohannon, she learned that he was trying to get funds added to the City's Capital Improvement
211 Plan (CIP; the City's long-term capital project planning document for larger expenditures) for
212 more comprehensive studies. Mr. Bohannon was enthusiastic about getting help for a preliminary
213 project, so Ms. Brunner consulted with Chair Von Plinsky and Ms. Clark before this meeting to
214 submit a CSI proposal, which did not promise the Commission's participation. If the
215 Conservation Commission does not want to take this project on, the Community Development
216 Department would. Included in this meeting's agenda packet was the proposal submitted for a
217 student team to study the Ladies' Wildwood Park and develop short-term and long-term forest
218 management strategies for the City to consider. If Mr. Bohannon can get something formal in the
219 CIP, it will help to determine what this project could look like.
220

221 Mr. Bergman thought this idea was interesting. He wondered if the students would be expected
222 to consult with a licensed forester to evaluate the site and develop the plan. Ms. Brunner said that
223 each student group has a faculty advisor, who would likely be experienced in this type of work.
224 She also thought the Cheshire County Forester, Matt Kelly, could be consulted. If selected, Chair
225 Von Plinsky thought that there would be very close interactions between the students and City
226 Staff, and the Conservation Commission could participate in those interactions too. The
227 Commission could request a presentation on the students' results.
228

229 Importantly, the Chair noted that this was all dependent on a student group choosing this
230 proposed project, which would occur over 4 months during the spring semester, for a total of 400
231 hours. The students should make their decision by the end of November or early December. If
232 this proposal is selected, Chair Von Plinsky said the Commission could decide how much they
233 want to be involved. This is an opportunity to help the next generation of conservationists.
234

235 **H) NHDOT Floodplain Compensatory Storage Project (Rt-101)**
236

237 Ms. Brunner recalled Mr. Bergman discussing the compensatory storage project on RT-101 at
238 the last meeting. While Ms. Brunner had not yet spoken with NH Department of Transportation
239 (DOT), she did attend the Southwest Region Planning Commission's Energy and Natural
240 Resources Advisory Committee meeting during the summer 2023. She showed some
241 presentation slides that a DOT representative shared at that meeting. She said this project was to

242 compensate for fill that was placed in the floodplain for 4 projects (Winchester Street
243 roundabout, Multi-Use Trail over NH 12/101, Base Hill Road intersection, and the bypass/West
244 Street interchange) over many years. Because the City participated in the Federal Emergency
245 Management Agency's (FEMA) Community Rating System program, anytime a development
246 places fill in the floodplain, compensatory storage is required to offset the fill, so that the amount
247 of water that can be held in the floodplain remains the same. DOT had been waiting a fairly long
248 time to compensate for these 4 projects, which placed a bit more than 20-acre-feet of fill in the
249 floodplain. DOT surveyed certain sites in the floodplain where they could accomplish those 20-
250 acre-feet without disturbing wetlands.

251
252 Ultimately, DOT chose the site on RT-9, which Ms. Brunner showed on the presentation slides.
253 This location allows there to be just one compensatory storage site (Site 9 on the slides). Initially,
254 DOT planned to dig just one hole at the same elevation, but public input led them to vary the
255 elevation and contours to look more natural, and also to leave a section of the forest standing.
256 Based on an acoustic survey of the site, DOT did not find the northern long eared bat. In
257 addition, after conducting surveys of the habitat on the site, no suitable habitat was found for the
258 dwarf wedgemussel or the greater fringed gentian. Ms. Brunner thought that one of DOT's
259 biggest concerns was invasive species management on the site, where they had already found a
260 lot. They would be planting native species and managing those for 1 year, after which invasive
261 species management would be a concern.

262
263 Mr. Bill recalled NH DOT presenting to the Commission a few years ago. Ms. Clark noted that
264 ARLAC had an opportunity to weigh in on this project; there were several meetings, and Ms.
265 Clark recalled being pleased because DOT was very responsive to ideas that would vary their
266 plans. Mr. Bergman mentioned that the Keene Sentinel had an article a few weeks before this
267 meeting that indicated DOT would be removing their equipment soon; it had not occurred by the
268 date of this meeting. He added there were some initial plantings, but DOT would return to do
269 more in the spring, and Ms. Clark agreed that there would be more herbaceous plantings.

270
271 Ms. Stanish asked what the DOT would do with all the fill. Ms. Clark said it gets moved around.
272 She said they made hummocks but did not take anything away. Mr. Bergman said there were a
273 lot of large trucks carrying soil and rocks, but he did not know where that went. Ms. Stanish
274 asked if the fill was supposed to remain in the floodplain but moved elsewhere. Ms. Clark
275 thought DOT was leaving fill on site and just building it up. Mr. Bergman said the excavations
276 were all down to a point that is still above "some average water level." Ms. Clark thought there
277 was already some water there. Ms. Brunner said DOT's goal was to stay above the water table so
278 it would grow into a wetland, without becoming a pond. Mr. Bergman thought that a lot of
279 people around town were wondering what was going on with this project; he talked to some
280 Filtrine employees near Best Western and they had no idea what was going on with the project.
281 Within 1-2 years, Mr. Bergman thought deer, egrets, herons, and spotted sandpipers might be
282 seen at this site. In response to Mr. Bill, Ms. Clark explained that DOT would remain responsible
283 for this land. Ms. Brunner did not think DOT planned to actively manage the site, but to let it

284 grow in as scrub-shrub. If invasives were to enter the site, Ms. Brunner did not think DOT had
285 budgeted for managing invasives.

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287 **6) New or Other Business**

288

289 Mr. Bergman explained that his neighborhood submitted a request to the City for a sidewalk so
290 he attended a Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee meeting. He
291 explained that at the same meeting, he heard the plan for RT-101 east toward Marlboro, where
292 DOT is trying to reconfigure the Swanzey Factory Road exit, in addition to culvert work and
293 more. He spoke with one of the DOT engineers because he was curious. While it seemed like the
294 work would be just east of Optical Avenue, he learned that most of the work is further east.
295 However, he noted that just east of Optical Avenue is a small pond beside the road that is on both
296 NH right-of-way land and the two private properties behind the pond, one of which he thought
297 was the old drive-in theater. Discussion ensued about what pond Mr. Bergman was referring to.
298 After clarification, Mr. Haynes and Ms. Clark agreed that the pond is not next to the old drive-in
299 property. Ms. Clark said the drawings sent by DOT showed that they would be mainly working
300 on the south side of RT-101 in the vicinity of the Stone Arch Bridge, at one point even proposing
301 a new bridge passage over it and one just south. Ms. Clark raised many concerns about those
302 plans. Discussion ensued on the various locations that DOT had proposed in the vicinity of the
303 Stone Arch Bridge. Mr. Bergman recalled the City Council urging DOT to stay away from this
304 historic landmark, which all Commissioners agreed was important for that entrance to Keene.
305 Mr. Bergman also recalled the City purchasing an older bridge from northern NH for \$1, which
306 is to be placed at the end of Eastern Avenue across RT-101 to join with the Stone Arch Bridge
307 landing. He also thought the City planned to reinforce some features of the Stone Arch Bridge in
308 the future. Ms. Clark thought the Conservation Commission was involved, because all land south
309 of RT-101—between the Stone Arch Bridge and Swanzey Factory Road intersection—is
310 considered conservation land. Chair Von Plinsky and Ms. Brunner would add this to future
311 Commission agendas to stay aware of this project. Mr. Bergman could share the contact
312 information for DOT’s chief engineer on the project.

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314 **7) Adjournment – Next Meeting Date: Monday, November 20, 2023**

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316 There being no further business, Chair Von Plinsky adjourned the meeting at 5:33 PM.

317

318 Respectfully submitted by,
319 Katryna Kibler, Minute Taker
320 October 23, 2023

321

322 Reviewed and edited by,
323 Mari Brunner, Senior Planner

From: [Councilor Robert Williams](#)
To: [Sparky Von Plinsky](#)
Cc: [Mari Brunner](#)
Subject: Conservation Commission letter on urban trees
Date: Sunday, November 12, 2023 10:28:57 PM

Dear Mr. Chair,

On an upcoming agenda for the Conservation Commission, I would like to include discussion of a proposal that you write a letter to the Mayor and City Council, on behalf of the Commission, alerting them as to our concerns with the current condition of Keene's urban forest.

Further, I would like to request that the city:

1. Conduct or commission an inventory and assessment of street trees within the public right of way.
2. Allocate additional funding to the city's existing street tree replacement program.
3. Establish a program for cost sharing of new trees with residential property owners, using a model similar to programs in [Manchester](#) or [Nashua](#).
4. Develop a plan to manage the succession of aging stands of white and red pine that were planted throughout the city following the 1938 hurricane.

I hope this makes for a fruitful discussion that can get the ball rolling on addressing these important needs.

Best,

Bobby

Bobby Williams
City Councilor, Ward 2
Keene, New Hampshire, USA