

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, December 12, 2023

8:15 AM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Arthur Winsor, Chair
Ruzzel Zullo, Vice Chair
Councilor Bettina Chadbourne
Stephen Hooper
Paul Bocko
Dian Mathews
Thomas Haynes, Alternate

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation &
Facilities Director

Members Not Present:

Suzy Krautmann

1) Call to Order – Roll Call

Chair Arthur Winsor called the meeting to order at 8:20 AM.

2) Approval of October 17, 2023 Minutes

A motion by Paul Bocko to approve the October 17, 2023 meeting minutes was duly seconded by Dian Mathews. Vice Chair Ruzzel Zullo abstained as he was not present at the meeting. The motion carried.

3) Finance Report

Andy Bohannon stated that there was nothing new regarding the finance report. Ms. Mathews will send Mr. Bohannon an updated invoice for work that was completed by Bagley Pond Nursery before the end of the year.

4) Report from the Friends of the Ashuelot River Park Arboretum

Leslie Casey, member of the Friends, was present at the meeting.

Ms. Mathews reported that the Friends worked tirelessly this past summer to keep the park in good shape. She believed they did more than they should have and that they will need to come up with a new plan to ensure their work isn't so physically demanding next year.

Ms. Mathews stated that with the help of Tim Garland (from the Parks and Cemeteries Division,) a cut was made from the asphalt by the nearby Starbucks (located on West Street,) sod was dug up, sand and sod were laid, and the base of the rain garden was put in and covered with compost for next year.

Some of the plants that were bought for the Bridge Garden last year (including two of the large plants) have expired. The Friends will see what survives the rest of the year and fill in with new plants next year. Ms. Mathews believed they would have to continue testing out which plants thrive in that garden, as the sun can be unpredictable in that spot.

Ms. Mathews continued, their big project for the winter will be creating plans to enlarge the Pollinator Garden, which will join into the "Wedding Photo Garden." It will be an extensive length, so they will create a cut-through, covered with woodchips. The current garden was created by twelve high school students and the plants were generously donated by Home Depot and the Garden Club.

Ms. Casey reported on the Friends' annual meeting. She stated that they took a trip to Franklin, NH for a park walk. She explained that Franklin has beautiful industrial relics, train trestle bridges, and granite structures. She believed something like that would not be available to the Ashuelot River Park but that they could clean up some of the invasive plants between the Knotweed Project and the dam to make it a more enjoyable stroll. She stated that Franklin has an eddy by their dam for kayakers to practice on whitewater as well as parkour equipment. She believed they should focus on outdoor sports at the park as well. Mr. Bohannon stated that outdoor sports aren't as appealing in the Northeast and he hasn't seen a lot of success with it in the past.

Councilor Chadbourne shared that she didn't like the Book Walk and thought the Park was beginning to feel too busy. She believed that too many new additions would take away from the nature in the park. Ms. Mathews stated that she has heard the same opinions from others. She believed the storybook signs were supposed to be 18 inches high but they are taller and would like to see them lowered. Mr. Bohannon stated he will revisit the specifications and give the Superintendent the information to review. Ms. Mathews also wanted to check with the people at the Library on the average length of the stories, as they may be able to shorten it and take a few of the storyboards down. Councilor Chadbourne suggested using smaller signs with a QR code for people to scan with their phones to learn about the Park, although she was unsure if she liked the idea of children using their phones at the park instead of enjoying the nature. Stephen Hooper suggested that there should be a balance between sharing education with the community and having an arboretum with nothing in it, which he believed they have achieved at the park. He would like to see a Bird Park or Sanctuary, as that offers education without the need for more

signage. Chair Winsor is pleased with the current state of the park but suggested they speak with Suzy Krautmann and the people at the Library to ensure the Book Walk is being used before they discuss removing any signs. Councilor Chadbourne asked if the Board decided upon the book walk to which Mr. Bohannon replied they did. Paul Bocko stated he would like to work with the Friends to think of a way to encourage kids to use the park for their studies and bring classrooms to the park. This could encourage use of the park for education without having to install something tangible.

Ms. Casey shared that she was working on a one-page project description sheet to define projects so everyone has the same understanding of the on-going projects. Mr. Bohannon shared that he has a project worksheet that was created a few years ago related to the Master Plan that he could update and bring back into use.

5) Master Plan Implementation

A) Bartlett Tree

Mr. Bohannon stated that they hired a consultant in regards to the vegetation control, specifically the knotweed along the river bank. He stated that he met with Andy Powers from Vegetation Control Services who will be doing the herbicide application, at a cost of around \$1,000.00. The treatment will start at the dam and lead up to where the bench is, as well as the fence line along the other side. Treatment will start late Summer 2024. Ms. Mathews stated that they will have dead trunks of all the saplings after herbicide application, so they will have to remove them by the Summer of 2025. Mr. Powers will need a special permit to work in the Park. They were able to maximize their dollar by working with Mr. Powers as he was already working on a contract with the Keene Public Works Department, so the ARPAB won't have to pay a second Special Permit Fee.

B) Rachel Marshall Area

Mr. Bohannon shared a proposal with the Board. He met with a vendor from a conference in Dallas, TX in October who makes fairy gardens (as seen in Boothbay Harbor, Maine) that could be placed in the Rachel Marshall area of the park. Mr. Bohannon stated that they would have to fundraise for this project as the price was close to \$35,000.00. Chair Winsor suggested the Board take time to look over the proposal before they make any decisions. He informed the Board he would be going to the Boothbay Harbor Botanical Garden and would try to take pictures of the fairy gardens to share with the Board and Friends. Councilor Chadbourne shared her objection regarding the fairy garden, stating it may take away from the nature. Vice Chair Zullo stated that when they spoke of adding a fairy garden in the past, he imagined it would be more hidden and something that park goers would have to seek out. Mr. Bohannon shared that the artist's other fairy garden locations charge an admission but to see them at the park would be free, as they have received LWCF grants in the past that would prohibit charging a fee. He believed this would be great for underserved families in the community to enjoy. The Board will add this to the next meeting's agenda to discuss further.

Mr. Bocko stated that he had been in contact with a grad student who is interested in developing educational components about birds on the Rachel Marshall side of the park. The student has work study, which would reduce the cost significantly. The project would begin in the Spring of 2024. Mr. Bocko and Mr. Bohannon will communicate about the cost before the January 2024 meeting to discuss it further so the Board can vote on it then.

Ms. Mathews suggested that each Board member share their vision on what they would like the Rachel Marshall side of the park to look like before they add anything new. Mr. Bohannon agreed that they should have a revision process to revisit the Master Plan and thought process behind it, as it may have evolved over the past four years since it was created. Mr. Bohannon stated that they are still waiting to hear if they will receive the new plot of land. He added that he would add the discussion about the dam to the next meeting's agenda.

C) Outdoor Education

Mr. Bocko stated that on November 4, Rich Holschuh (Chair of the Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs) lead a walk through the park and spoke on his Native American heritage. Mr. Bocko and Ms. Mathews confirmed it was very educational and enjoyable. Mr. Holschuh shared his own personal journey of when he turned his attention toward the Elnu Abenaki Tribe's way of seeing things, which helped him heal his life. Mr. Bocko shared that the Antioch University New England (AUNE) paid Mr. Holschuh \$300.00 and asked the Board if half could be paid out of the ARPAB budget. Ms. Mathews made a motion to contribute \$150.00 to AUNE for Mr. Holschuh's November 4 talk. Vice Chair Zullo seconded the motion. Mr. Bocko abstained. The motion passed. Ms. Mathews suggested that they consider working with AUNE and Mr. Holschuh again as part of their outdoor education planning. Vice Chair Zullo stated they could add it to the Master Plan once they revisit it.

6) New/Other Business

None presented.

7) Adjournment – Next Meeting Date: Tuesday, January 9, 2024 at 8:15 AM

There being no further business, Chair Winsor adjourned the meeting at 9:23 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Melissa Danneker, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Andy Bohannon, PRF Director