

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, December 18, 2023

4:30 PM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

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

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner

Members Not Present:

Deborah LeBlanc, Alternate
Brian Reilly, Alternate

1) Call to Order

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

2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – November 20, 2023

Revision: Line 25, replace “ecology” with “geology.”

A motion by Vice Chair Madison to approve the November 20, 2023 minutes as amended was duly seconded by Mr. Walker. On a roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

3) Report-Outs:

A) Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Subcommittee

Mr. Haynes reported that the Subcommittee met on December 8 and talked in part about enlarging some of the kiosk maps. New signage continues to be posted, with positive feedback. The Subcommittee created a project list for 2024. They were working to prioritize the list and exploring potential grant opportunities for that work. The Subcommittee had also received

positive feedback on this past summer's trail work, which seemed to be holding up well, with fewer muddy areas to traverse. The Subcommittee had also begun reviewing the goals and recommendations from the Greater Goose Pond Forest Stewardship Plan, which includes foci on community outreach, education, wildlife habitat, forest stewardship, and trails. To date, the Subcommittee had largely focused on trails, but they were ready to begin work beyond the trails, though they were undecided as to what that new focus should be. One project could be improvements to the Mattson and Lower Drummer Hill trails that are mostly used by hikers and not cyclists. The Subcommittee was also focused on a bridge near the spillway so users do not have to walk through the water; the bridge cannot go over the spillway, but there is space for a bridge below the spillway where the concrete portion ends.

The Subcommittee's next meeting was scheduled for January 5.

B) Invasive Species

Nothing to report due to winter.

C) Land Conservation

Nothing to report.

4) Discussion Items:

A) Letter to City Council re: Recommendations for Urban Forest Management

Discussion ensued about the letter that the Commission approved Chair Von Plinsky writing to the City Council urging for an urban forest management plan for the City. The matter would be forwarded to the City Council's Finance, Organization, & Personnel (FOP) Committee for their meeting on January 11, 2024 at 6:00 PM. As many Commissioners as possible should attend to advocate for this action; at minimum, Chair Von Plinsky, Vice Chair Madison (on the FOP Committee), and Councilor Williams would attend. The Commission's letter would be forwarded to the FOP Committee, but other Commissioners could also submit letters of support. Ms. Brunner noted that the City Manager asked a Public Works representative to provide an update at the FOP meeting; a Public Works employee was working on a tree inventory using the City's Cartegraph software, in addition to a project included in the City's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Moving forward, Councilor Williams noted that there could be challenges as the Public Works Director, Kürt Blomquist, was retiring in December; he was an ally for this effort.

B) Keene Meadow Solar Station Project Update

There was no update. Previous discussions about the property owners leading a public walk of the property had not progressed.

C) Potential Land Purchase Update (Rt-9/Washington St. Ext. Properties)

As discussed at the last meeting, Mr. Bergman emailed Ryan Owens, Executive Director of the Monadnock Conservancy. Mr. Owens indicated that the Conservancy was interested in these parcels before Hull Forest Products bought them to harvest timber. Anne McBride, the Conservancy's Land Protection Director, would contact City Staff/the Commission about this, likely in January 2024. Mr. Owens assured Mr. Bergman that the Conservancy was very interested. These parcels were not listed as top priorities on the NH Wildlife Action Plan. If Ms. McBride communicates with Mr. Bergman, he would forward to Chair Von Plinsky and Ms. Brunner. Chair Von Plinsky and Mr. Bergman would work to schedule a meeting with Ms. McBride, and potentially invite her to a Commission meeting.

D) Airport Proposed Wildlife Control Fence Update

Nothing to report.

E) Neighborhood Pollinator Garden Update

Mr. Therriault met with two landowners from the Edgewood neighborhood and decided on an approach, which the neighbors wrote and sent to Andy Bohannon, Director of Parks, Recreation, & Facilities. The location would be near the flagpole in the common area. The neighbors would meet with Mr. Bohannon and Mr. Therriault on January 8, 2024 at 2:00 PM. Any work would be completed by neighborhood volunteers, so no labor is added to the Parks, Recreation, & Facilities Staff.

F) Antioch University CSI Proposal

Ms. Brunner had not received an update despite contacting the University, so the Commission assumed its project was not chosen by the students.

G) NH DOT Route 101 Project

This project was east of the Stone Arch Bridge, where Swanzey Factory Road meets the highway. Tentatively, a public information session was scheduled for January 8; the session was listed on the NH Department of Transportation's (DOT) Community Engagement Plan (on their website). Ms. Brunner contacted the project manager, who would confirm the date before the end of December. Ms. Brunner would keep the Commission apprised of the date. Commissioners were encouraged to attend so any concerns could be voiced proactively vs. reactionary. Ms. Brunner noted that only two public meetings were planned throughout the project—one in January 2024 and another sometime in 2025.

Mr. Haynes recalled attending a meeting about the Transportation Heritage Trail in early December 2023. At that meeting, there was conversation about NH DOT's work on Rt-101 in

2028, and he wondered if that was connected to the Stone Arch Bridge work. Ms. Brunner was unsure, but mentioned that NH DOT has a 10-year transportation plan, and every two years they hold a public hearing on that plan. The Rt-101 project was in that 10-year plan but the Transportation Heritage Trail project (funded from different DOT funds in a different year) was not. The City tried to encourage DOT to coordinate construction for both projects at the same time to reduce the amount of disruption. Mr. Bergman also attended the public meeting on the Transportation Heritage Trail and agreed that the City was urging coordination of the two projects. This should remain on the agenda.

H) Committee Membership & Leadership

In January 2024, the Commission would vote to elect the Chair and Vice Chair for the year. Chair Von Plinsky was willing to continue as Chair through 2024, with the understanding that he would step back from that role at the end of 2024. Councilor Madison was willing to continue as Vice Chair, but Ms. LeBlanc had also expressed interest in being Vice Chair in 2024 to shadow Chair Von Plinsky, which could allow her to take over as Chair in 2025. Anyone else interested should put their names forward at the January meeting.

I) Outreach

The Commission considered potential outreach activities. Mr. Therriault mentioned that before Covid, he used to visit elementary school classrooms (2nd and 3rd grades) to present on pollinators during the spring, when the children would already be learning about pollinators. He was told by SAU 29 that he would have to write to each school principal to get permission and coordinate, which Mr. Therriault planned to do in January 2024. Mr. Therriault would communicate with the Commission if he needs help with this effort.

Ms. Brunner recalled the Commission discussing the possibility of an email list for volunteers. She communicated with the Communications & Marketing Director, Rebecca Landry, and the City Clerk, Patty Little. They were not in favor of a large, general volunteer sign-up. Rather, they felt it was better to be more specific. Ms. Brunner was awaiting more details and would report to the Commission in January.

Mr. Therriault recalled being contacted about a bee colony living at the Keene Public Library. He had expected to hear from the City about a long-term plan—leave, move, or kill (with a mild winter, the colony might survive since it is located against a heated wall of the Library)—but had not heard anything yet. He did not think the decision was up to the Library maintenance person who contacted Mr. Therriault. Vice Chair Madison thought it was likely Mr. Bohannon's decision as the Facilities Director. Mr. Therriault said he would talk to Mr. Bohannon. Councilor Williams also offered to mention it at the upcoming Library Board of Trustees meeting.

Mr. Haynes was still interested in progressing with a Goose Pond Through the Seasons series. The Cheshire County Forester, Matt Kelly, might be interested in helping.

Another idea from Ms. Clark that the Commission considered for a long time before Covid was the Tap to Toilet series—where water comes from and where it goes, including tours of the water treatment plant, wastewater treatment plant, and possibly/ideally the Roxbury reservoir. Aaron Costa, Assistant Public Works Director, is in charge of the wastewater treatment plant and Ben Crowder, Water & Sewer Operations Manager, oversees the water treatment plant. Mr. Haynes offered to invite Mr. Costa and Mr. Crowder to a Commission meeting to explain how both plants work.

A discussion ensued about waste infiltration at a well on the Dusty Dog Horse Farm in west Keene, with concerns that there was not an adequate buffer zone. There was mention of another location beyond Arch Street, where a dog park was formerly planned; the City now plans for a well field there as a back-up for west Keene, but there is no pump house there. Further discussion ensued about other well locations associated with local farms.

5) Adoption of 2024 Meeting Schedule

A motion by Vice Chair Madison to adopt the 2024 meeting schedule was duly seconded by Mr. Walker. On a roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

6) New or Other Business

Ms. Clark recalled the November meeting, when she shared that she met with Peter Hansel from the Keene Rotary Club about volunteering. He shared some information that Ms. Clark would forward to Ms. Brunner to share with the Commission. Mr. Hansel was also trying to curate a list of volunteers that might be different than the one Ms. Landry pursues.

7) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Von Plinsky adjourned the meeting at 5:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katrnya Kibler, Minute Taker
December 26, 2023

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner