

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, July 14, 2015

8:00 AM

Rm 12, Recreation Center

Members Present:

Arthur (Bud) Winsor, Chair
George Foskett
Jenna Spear-O'Mara
Susan Thielen (arrived at 8:08 AM)

Staff Present:

Andrew Bohannon, Parks & Recreation
Director

Others Present:

Members Not Present:

Judy Sadoski
Jamie White, Alternate

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Winsor called the meeting to order at 8:03 AM.

2. Approval of Minutes – June 9, 2015

Mr. Foskett made a motion to approve the minutes of June 9, 2015, which was seconded by Ms. Spear-O'Mara, and passed by a vote of 3 to 0.

3. Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon reported that they received their first bill and the budget reflects that. He continued that the contractor's total is \$5,000 for all of the maintenance. This is lower than they expected, so it gives them the opportunity to do some other things in the park. Mr. Foskett noted that there is approval for \$7,800 worth of work to be done in the park, and asked what happens with the remainder. Discussion ensued and the ARPAB members had questions. Mr. Bohannon stated that he would need clarification from the City's Purchasing Agent, but he thinks the person should do all of the work for the price that he bid.

Susan Thielen arrived at 8:08 AM.

Mr. Bohannon continued that they can maybe ask Bartlett Tree to do some work for the remainder of the funds. Chair Winsor stated that yesterday he, Mr. Bohannon, and Mr. Foskett met with Bartlett Tree for an explanation of the work they had done, which was good work. He continued that they noticed weeding that needed to be done. He asked if the contractor can do that work. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, he will follow up on that.

4. Report from the Friends of the Arboretum at Ashuelot River Park

Mr. Foskett stated that he has no report because the Friends did not meet. He continued that they have a meeting today at 4:00 PM. Mr. Bohannon replied that he will be there.

5. Park Discussion

a) West Street Hydro

Mr. Bohannon stated that West Street Hydro did a presentation, attended by the Ashuelot River Preservation group, the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES)'s Dam Bureau, Planning Director Rhett Lamb, Public Works Director Kürt Blomquist, and himself. He showed and explained drawings that were shown at the presentation about what the power house will look like. He continued that he has a drawing of the power house he could show another time. He explained the one-foot board that the group plans to add across the top of the spillway, which would open and close with the water levels.

Ms. Thielen asked how much power this would generate. Mr. Bohannon replied that it is more or less for educational purposes and to save the dam. Ms. Thielen asked about the noise. Mr. Bohannon replied that the current noise, from the flow of the water going over the falls, will disappear because that flow goes away with this project. The only time you will hear it is when the water is going over the board. He continued that the ARPAB has previously expressed support for this project and they can weigh in again if they want to. Discussion ensued, and ARPAB members agreed that they do not like the idea of losing the waterfall.

Ms. Thielen asked what is going on with trees being cut down, in conjunction with this. Mr. Bohannon replied that the City received a letter of deficiency for the dam, from the NHDES. He continued that the City asked the NHDES for time to examine three options – 1) going with West Street Hydro's plan, 2) removing the dam (DuBois & King are creating a plan for what that would look like), and 3) keeping the dam, without the hydro project, and removing all trees within 15 feet of both sides of the dam. A hydrology study is still being completed, which will indicate what the impact would be on the rest of the river.

Per ARPAB members' questions, Mr. Bohannon explained that the NHDES's tree removal requirement is so that the trees do not fall over and travel downstream in the case of a flood. Discussion continued about the ARPAB members' opinions about the three options. Ms. Spear-O'Mara stated that she does not see the benefits to the hydro project. Chair Winsor stated that to him the only good option is leaving the waterfall. He asked what the City thinks and if the cost is too high. Mr. Bohannon replied that there is a big cost no matter what. He continued that there is a difference in opinion among City staff, regarding keeping the dam or getting rid of it. He continued that the dam was roughly put in about 200 years ago, which pre-dates the mill. Discussion continued about the dam and mill's history.

Ms. Thielen asked if they have gathered public input for what the public thinks about the dam. Mr. Bohannon replied that he does not know. Mr. Foskett stated that he is opposed to anything that does away with the dam. Chair Winsor asked about preserving the dam for historical reasons. Mr. Bohannon replied that the State is more concerned with safety than historical value.

Mr. Foskett asked if the State would come in and take action on the dam if the City does nothing. Mr. Bohannon replied no, action would still be required, but it would be up to the community to fund it.

Mr. Bohannon suggested the ARPAB stay close to this. He continued that it will probably be a couple months until they hear the results of the hydrology study. He suggests this group compose a letter about how they feel about the dam in relation to the park, to be on record.

Ms. Spear-O'Mara asked why not just put the board on the spillway up when they want to demonstrate the hydro power, instead of leaving it up most of the time. Mr. Bohannon replied that by leaving it up most of the time the group will generate enough power to pay for their investment. He continued that the group says that if there are any funds generated, they would go back to the conservation fund for the City. He asked at the presentation, why not have those funds go directly into Ashuelot River Park. Those funds could fund long-term projects in the park, like trail improvements, tree maintenance, and the irrigation system. The hydro system might yield only a small amount of profit but it would add up.

Ms. Spear-O'Mara suggested the ARPAB invite the West Street Hydro people to a meeting once they are done with hydrology work. Mr. Bohannon asked if they want to invite Bob King to a later meeting. Chair Winsor replied yes. He continued that they want to know if there is any way to preserve the waterfall. They want to express their concern about this to the West Street Hydro group. Brief discussion ensued about West Street Hydro's website. The group agreed that it is misleading to show the aerial photo with the waterfall.

b) Bartlett Tree Trimming

Mr. Foskett reported that he and others met with Frank Grano, to see what work Bartlett Tree has done in the park already. He explained the work, such as cabling two river birches to help them grow better, trimming some black locusts and an English oak, and thinning out a maple tree by the West Street entrance. They were very pleased with Bartlett Tree's work. They talked about what to do going forward. They would like a plan to address three or four trees each year, for example, and have an ongoing operation. Ms. Spear-O'Mara asked about cost. Mr. Bohannon replied that it would be relatively inexpensive when they go little by little. Discussion ensued, and Ms. Spear-O'Mara and Chair Winsor spoke of the benefits of maintaining the trees little by little on a regular basis.

Chair Winsor stated that he has not seen the website yet for Ashuelot River Park's tree inventory and he has to push Mr. Grano for that. Mr. Bohannon replied that they probably want to be paid first. Discussion ensued about how eager everyone is to see the website.

c) Irrigation System

Mr. Bohannon stated that they had talked about this a couple years ago and decided to keep going with the current system pumping out of the river. He continued that in May they were not able to get the necessary production out of the water source that they needed to create healthy garden beds. He asked what the hydro project's impact would be on this, and the answer was, no one knows. They might be back in the same situation. The only alternative is to use City water. They have asked how much that would cost and he should be able to report back at the next meeting. They would need funding for that project. They will put together specs for getting a new system in place. The current one is antiquated at 30 years old. They want a fresh outlook on how this will be and to make sure it will remain steady. Chair Winsor replied yes, and they

want to possibly have watering outlets for the plants if they need it. He asked what the next step is. Mr. Bohannon replied that he will have a package for the ARPAB at the next meeting.

d) Sign for Park Policies

Mr. Bohannon stated that he needs to bring back information for the ARPAB. Chair Winsor stated that he and Mr. Foskett noted that the signs are getting old. He suggested they have fewer signs and words – people often do not stop to read long signs. Mr. Bohannon stated that Rutland mounted the mitt box to the trash can, thus removing the need for the sign (about picking up dog waste). He continued that he likes that idea. Ms. Spear-O'Mara asked for him to send her the photo. Discussion ensued about the importance of having enough trash cans.

6. New Business

Chair Winsor reported that he is going to a workshop on Friday at Swarthmore College about everything related to organically managing arboretums. He continued that it includes admission to some gardens and he hopes to bring back good information and photographs. The trend seems to be using fewer chemicals and pesticides to manage landscapes. Ms. Spear-O'Mara added that that helps pollinators.

7. Next Meeting Date – August 11, 2015

Ms. Spear-O'Mara reported that she will not be available on August 11. Discussion ensued about when to have the next meeting. The ARPAB tentatively decided to skip August and meet again on September 8, but if Chair Winsor is on vacation that day (he will find out, and email Mr. Bohannon), they will meet at a later date in August.

8. Adjournment

Hearing no other business, Chair Winsor adjourned the meeting at 8:49 AM.

Respectfully submitted by
Britta Reida, Minute-taker