

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, February 13, 2018

8:00 AM

Parks and Recreation, Room 12

Members Present:

Arthur Winsor, Chair
Councilor Steve Hooper
George Foskett
Judy Sadoski
Chuck Redfern (By Phone)

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Director of Parks, Recreation
and Facilities

Members Not Present:

Jenna Spear-O'Mara

1) Welcome & Call to Order

Chair Winsor called the meeting to order at 8:02 AM.

2) Approval of Minutes – December 12, 2018

Mr. Foskett made a motion to approve the minutes of December 12, 2017, which was seconded by Ms. Sadoski and carried unanimously.

3) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon noted the Committee would discuss budget creation later in the meeting.

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

Mr. Foskett reported that the Friends did not meet in January but they are still working to achieve 501c3 non-profit status. This non-profit process has delayed the new cobblestone brochures and therefore delayed increasing the price of cobblestones from \$50 to \$75.

5) KSC Landscape Values Mapping Project – Lisa Donnelly

Chair Winsor welcome Lisa Donnelly from Keene State College (KSC) to present her report on landscape values mapping, which the Committee received via email. Ms. Donnelly noted this project was for both Ashuelot River Park and Goose Pond Forest.

She surveyed park visitors about the different activities they enjoy in the park (and where), ways they would like to see the park improved, and places they feel safest and unsafe.

Ms. Donnelly continued that the survey was primarily online, though some were handwritten. She provided respondents with a map and asked them to indicate the three places where they most enjoy certain activities (active recreation, family activities, solitude, nature/wildlife, and other). She noted some of the maps were unclear because of unofficial trails on private property on the west side of the river; very few respondents indicated use of those western areas. With the survey data she created a heat map that included locations from all four categories as well as a map for each individual category. She learned the following information from the surveys:

- There is a lot of activity near the waterfall; people would like to see more picnic tables across the bridge because the benches there are usually occupied. There is concern about groups of people smoking on the other side of the bridge.
- There is a lot of activity in the garden area by Starbucks.
- The central portion of the park was labeled both safe and unsafe; this shows that feeling safe is an individual perception based on experiences.
 - The biggest safety concern is homelessness and camps on the other side of the river; most visitors avoid those areas but still run into homeless on the trails. People like the benches for wildlife observation just up the Jonathan Daniels Trail but would like the trail to be improved to feel safer.
- Concerns about trails: path maintenance, hedges too high, and proximity of trails to housing.
- The northern area of the park has the least activity.

Mr. Foskett clarified that the report refers to the arboretum as the manicured portion of the park and not as the arboretum; he noted many people do not perceive that three-acre parcel as the arboretum, but just the general park. Ms. Donnelly replied that she did not know that was an arboretum and did not come across that information in her research; Mr. Bohannon agreed there is not much information available about the arboretum to educate the public about its purpose and intended use. Otherwise, Mr. Foskett said it was a great report and added he did not realize the park actually extends past the hospital.

Ms. Sadoski said it was a good report and included important information. She said she sits on the west side of the bridge and sees people and children playing in the shallow areas; she thinks people park in the adjacent private parking lot and bring their children to go fishing on the weekends. She said it is clear the arboretum and just across the bridge are the most appealing for family activities. Chair Winsor suggested that more picnic tables might facilitate family activities across the bridge if the Friends do not want park activities in the arboretum. Ms. Donnelly said families enjoy and appreciate the open grass areas of the arboretum. Ms. Sadoski agreed with Chair Winsor that the area just across the bridge is great and has shallow water for kids to play, it is just undeveloped; perhaps it is better to leave it informal so group activities are not encouraged.

Chair Winsor said, consistent with these project results, safety has been a prominent topic for the Committee recently. Mr. Foskett added there is a lot of foot traffic from the housing development near Harper's Acres; Mr. Bohannon noted that part of the trail needs work due to erosion but is private property the City cannot address. Councilor Hooper agreed safety is an important area of focus, particularly outside the arboretum; he said he has been a proponent of more lighting in the arboretum as well. Ms. Donnelly replied that most people appreciate the arboretum as 'finished' and expressed how much they love that area; still, people want to expand further onto park trails but require better lighting. She noted the trail on the west side of the river is inaccessible and on private property, without any signage indicating that. Mr. Bohannon agreed that is all private property.

Mr. Redfern asked if there was any mention of the vacant parking lot along the Jonathan Daniels trail. Ms. Donnelly replied someone suggested converting that to a picnic area and agrees it would be a great parcel to develop. The maps in the survey did not significantly include that parcel because it is private property.

Mr. Bohannon thanked Ms. Donnelly and her advisor Chris Brehme. He noted that KSC geography students have been doing excellent work and studies on City lands that benefit the City and in this case, echo the concerns of this Committee and indicate the Committee is on the right track. Her work is also timely with the Goose Pond Stewardship Plan currently being developed for the City. Ms. Donnelly said this project was her pleasure and she enjoyed seeing people who love these spaces and are enthusiastic to provide feedback.

6) Budget Development

- a. **Landscaping**
- b. **Hamblet Electric**
- c. **Bartlett Tree**
- d. **Chuck Simpson Landscaping**

Mr. Bohannon said he included a typical sample budget in the meeting packet that includes landscaping, planting replacement, Bartlett Tree, and miscellaneous expenses (\$500 last year). If the Committee continues working with the same landscaper (spring clean-up, mulching, weeding, and fall clean-up) the landscaping budget should remain approximately the same. He has not gone back out to contract for that landscaping and may get another extension to continue with the same consultant MJ Landscaping, who works on many City properties. Mr. Foskett noted the park had a lot of success with volunteers in 2017; if that continues it could reduce the need to hire landscapers for as much work.

Mr. Bohannon continued that the Bartlett Tree proposed budget is approximately \$400 higher than in 2017 because there is a silver maple that should be addressed this year. The trustees could deprioritize something else on the budget or approve that increase.

Mr. Bohannon included an estimate for Chuck Simpson in 2018, which is the second of his three year project. Mr. Simpson helped to develop the park, worked with the NH Landscape Association, and helps with cost reduction when he works in the park. Mr. Foskett noted the third year of this project should not be as time-intensive to complete and suggested Mr. Simpson could also work on the hosta beds if they are not snow packed. Mr. Bohannon agreed that is a possibility.

Mr. Bohannon has yet to get a reply from Hamblet Electric because winter is a difficult time to investigate the lights. They are doing light fixtures in other parts of the City and want to ensure those in the park are consistent to keep costs lower. He noted this is not for the solar lights the Committee has discussed but for replacement fixtures with LED lights that are brighter and save energy costs over time.

The total proposed budget in the meeting packet is \$14,225. Next, Mr. Bohannon will propose this budget to the trustees, make any necessary changes, and report back to the Committee in March.

Mr. Foskett made a motion to approve the budget as presented in the February 13, 2018 meeting packet, which was seconded by Ms. Sadoski and carried unanimously.

7) Board Membership

Mr. Bohannon noted that all City Committee membership is being evaluated. Susan Thielen has been officially removed from the list of Committee members; there is one vacancy for an active member and one vacancy for an alternate. Ms. Sadoski, Mr. Foskett, and Mr. Redfern's terms end in December 2018 but they could request an extension. Councilor Hooper can serve as long as he is a Councilor and Mr. Foskett continues to represent the Friends. If someone is interested in joining the Committee they should send a signed letter to the City Clerk who will discuss the possibility with the Mayor.

8) Park Discussion

a. Pollinator Habitat – Letter from John Therriault

Mr. Bohannon introduced John Therriault who shared his experience with bees in the hydroponic garden at his home. He has encountered many species of bees in his garden but no honey bees. Following some research he learned that 65% of NH managed honey bee hives did not survive the last winter (2016-2017). With weather conditions this winter, the losses will likely be similar and large colonies of honey bees will die off. He joined the Monadnock Bee Keepers Association and has learned about damage that monocultures (agriculture that does not foster diversity and variety honey bees require) in this region are not providing sufficient pollen and nectar nutritionally necessary for these bees to thrive. This year he is creating a pollinator garden at his home and he is interested in finding other City lands that could support a pollinator garden. These gardens would not need to be intensively managed; they would need to be covered with black plastic to suppress any current growth and reseeded with native wildflowers that foster pollination.

He sent a letter to the City Manager to inquire about land near his home but found that land is already leased to a farmer for haying. Mr. Bohannon suggested this might be possible in the park, could intersect well with Mr. Simpson's work, and could be an opportunity for education while supporting these pollinators.

Mr. Therriault continued describing the native plants (all perennials) that would be ideal in a pollinator garden (the entire garden would be in bloom from approximately June 1 until hard frost):

- Dutch white clover – grows to 6", covers the ground, planted in early spring; enhances soil nitrogen content to support the other flowers
- Sedum (a type of succulent) – grows to 12", needs minimal water, flowers for three months in the summer
- New England Aster – grows to 24", purple and yellow flowers, quality nectar and pollen source during the fall months until hard frost

The ideal size of this garden would be 10' by 10' in direct sun (or $\frac{3}{4}$ at minimum) on flat ground or slight slope.

Mr. Foskett noted the state had planted wildflowers at RT-9 and Maple Avenue for beautification; these beds were not well-maintained, but the state could also be a resource for Mr. Therriault's idea. He asked if there is a specific area of the park Mr. Therriault is interested in. Mr. Therriault replied he is unsure without knowing the Committee's goals for the park. Councilor Hooper clarified this would be a garden bed for people to observe and enjoy, not one to walk through; Mr. Therriault agreed the clover can withstand foot traffic but the others cannot.

Mr. Bohannon said he will talk with Mr. Simpson about a potential collaboration on this and possible locations to foster education and pollinators. The only area Mr. Foskett could recall with full sun is near Starbucks. Mr. Bohannon said if money were no object he would convert the hayfield at the cemetery into a wildflower garden for pollinators; however, as Mr. Therriault indicated, the seeds are not inexpensive. Mr. Brehme added northern areas of the park have little activity and full sun. Mr. Therriault shared a fact sheet on each flower and will continue discussions with Mr. Bohannon.

9) New Business

10) Next Meeting – March 13, 2018

11) Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Chair Winsor adjourned the meeting at 8:52 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker