

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, August 13, 2019

8:00 AM

Recreation Center, Room 12

Members Present:

Arthur Winsor, Chair
George Foskett
Judy Sadoski
Suzy Krautman
Councilor Steve Hooper

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Director of Parks, Recreation
& Facilities

Members Not Present:

Paul Bocko
Dave Whaley

1) Welcome & Call to Order

Chair Winsor called the meeting to order at 8:00 AM.

2) Rules of Procedure Adoption

The Board learned about and voted to adopt the rules of procedure from the City Attorney at the previous meeting. No further actions were needed.

3) Approval of July 9, 2019 Minutes

On page three of the minutes, Mr. Foskett noted that "Surrey Mountain Dam" should be corrected as "West Swanzey Dam".

Mr. Foskett moved to approve the minutes of July 9, 2019 as amended, which Councilor Hooper seconded and the Board voted unanimously.

4) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon reported an updated budget included in the meeting packet that reflected the spring clean-up and mulch as paid. So far in 2019, the Board has used \$5,250. Mr. Bohannon has been communicating with Bartlett Tree regarding pruning that seemed delayed.

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

Mr. Foskett recalled the Links volunteers from Keene State College (KSC), who accomplished a lot during their afternoon working on July 8, despite the heat. He appreciated members of the Friends and this Board helping that day as well. Mr. Foskett said he hoped the volunteers scheduled for August 20 would focus on weeding; he said weeds are out of control this year. He will be on vacation for the upcoming workday but Mr. Bohannon will keep the focus on weeding.

Mr. Foskett expressed difficulty securing long-term volunteers to manage sections of the arboretum. Some areas are maintained wonderfully by volunteer groups annually, while others might accept a section but not return the next year. Ms. Krautman asked if there is a map listing where volunteers are assigned. Mr. Foskett said yes and added that the Old Homestead Garden Club is more active than in the past, in addition to a retired teachers group and annual volunteer days. Still, he said it is challenging to keep up with the three acres of arboretum.

Mr. Foskett reported that the Friends keep the West Street Dam on their meeting agendas because it continues arising as a topic of focus in the City. Mr. Bohannon agreed the City was issued a letter of deficiency for that dam from the state.

Mr. Foskett questioned purchasing daffodil bulbs, which Mr. Bohannon said he will work on buying and replanting in the fall between Parks and Recreation and Diane Matthews from the Old Homestead Garden Club. Mr. Foskett said the Friends are working toward renewed fundraising efforts to help the arboretum adapt as a shade garden.

Councilor Hooper offered to solicit volunteers through his personal social media. Mr. Foskett said it is important to describe the need for sustained volunteers.

6) Park Discussion

a. Park Clean-Up, August 20th 9am-12pm

A mostly female group is anticipated, which members agreed has resulted in significant past work accomplished; 20-25 volunteers are anticipated. Members of Parks and Recreation staff will be there to provide tools and members of the Old Homestead Garden Club will be present to help lead the volunteers as well. KSC staff will be present in a sufficient ratio to students as well.

b. QR Codes

Chair Winsor reported more funds remaining in his budget at KSC to contribute the 50% of this cost. Mr. Bohannon will work on this for the next meeting.

c. LED Lights Installed

Mr. Bohannon reported the new brighter LED safety lights are installed, which makes the City eligible for a \$200 rebate from Eversource, bringing that projects cost to \$1,200—not from the Board's budget, but leftover from the irrigation project.

d. Bat Houses

Councilor Hooper reported that he, Ms. Evans, and Chuck Sweeney walked the park and picked four places to install the bat houses, which will occur when the Parks and Recreation staff have time before winter (Mr. Bohannon aimed for end of September). Councilor Hooper thanked Mr. Bohannon, the Parks and Recreation Department, and this Board for supporting this project.

Mr. Foskett asked if a bat house will be installed in the arboretum. Mr. Bohannon said yes, just on the other side of the bridge toward Melanson's; it is out of the way but obvious.

Councilor Hooper recalled that Peter Poanessa is working on the educational signs; one will be under the bat house in the public area and the second location is to be determined. He is unsure if Ms. Evans will be in the region still to see the project completed as she has completed her degree. He hopes there can be a gathering in the park to share the project with the public, which he thought might have to wait until spring depending on then the houses and signs are installed. Mr. Bohannon said the fall could be a great time as well and could include the Keene Swamp Bats mascot. Councilor Hooper said there is another newer looking bat house in the old Rachel Marshall area; he was unsure who placed that house but said the more the merrier. He said this project went extremely well and he will continue working with Mr. Bohannon and Mr. Bocko to ensure the program is ongoing.

e. **Conway School Proposal**

Mr. Bohannon said he sent a letter to the Conway School indicating there is a funding source, which they requested. He submitted to them the meeting minutes and a letter demonstrating the funding source in order to keep the proposal active. Though they indicated in response to the proposal that a decision could be made in a few weeks or months, Mr. Bohannon said their decision makers usually meet in September and he anticipates an idea of if this will happen by the October or November Board meeting. He said that if Keene is chosen, they will do a full inventory to assess the arboretum's sustainability from a climate change perspective, will advise plantings moving forward to ensure the park is adapting to climate change impacts, and will advise design changes related to the pergola/gazebo that the Board requested. He said the timing is good for this project while there is not clarity on what is happening with the Ashuelot Greenspace.

7) **New Business**

Mr. Foskett said there is a large hole near the new irrigation box cover (facing the box from the park) but there is no leak. Mr. Bohannon will look into it. Mr. Foskett recalled a request for an adapter to get water from the irrigation system and Mr. Bohannon requested more time.

Councilor Hooper noted there is an abandoned garden in the old Rachel Marshall area, down the path toward Melanson's. That outdoor learning lab was disbanded long ago and Councilor Hooper expressed concern that the garden exists but is uncared for, especially because there are nice day lilies being suffocated there without care. He requested this topic be included on a future meeting agenda to decide if the garden should be maintained or to transplant the lilies because he said it looks unprofessional. Mr. Bohannon recalled that the middle school adopted

that area long ago but the school will not be coming back to maintain it. His staff cleared that area fairly significantly when Eversource needed to work in the area. Councilor Hooper said the high quality lilies can be easily transplanted to the arboretum and Mr. Bohannon agreed the stone could be saved, and the efforts that went into establishing those lilies will be better served in the arboretum.

Ms. Krautman asked if there is a path from the current middle school to the park, Ms. Sadoski said there is a path but it does not connect; all agreed it is a beautiful 750' boardwalk in the swamp area. Mr. Bohannon recalled that the City discontinued some trails that were remote and traversed homeless camps. He said it ultimately all comes back to safety for him, especially when considering children. Chair Winsor said he hopes some day this Board can revisit next steps for the Rachel Marshall area and suggested perhaps the Conway School could look at that aspect of the park; Mr. Bohannon said that might be outside the scope of this project. Ms. Krautman asked if there was a Rachel Marshall Trust and Mr. Bohannon said yes, there is still approximately \$17,000 remaining earmarked for renovations of Russell Park (former Carpenter Field).

Chair Winsor asked if there had been less night activity in the park with the new lights. Mr. Bohannon said he said seen cops walking the park during the day who have mentioned their appreciation of the much brighter lights, though he had not yet passed by at night himself. Chair Winsor asked about homeless activity in the park this summer. Mr. Bohannon said there has been less activity than usual. However, he recently found a large homeless campsite along the river (across the river from the trail), halfway up the trail from the housing development. Councilor Hooper observed cops in the park talking to people sitting on benches. He said there is one gentleman who seems harmless but goes up to people wanting to talk or interact with pets, which can make people nervous. While this man seems very friendly—he even thanked Councilor Hooper for his volunteer efforts—Councilor Hooper expressed concern for the comfort of female park goers. Mr. Bohannon agreed the man can seem aggressive at times. With this exception, Councilor Hooper said he thinks the immediate park is in good shape regarding the homeless.

Ms. Krautman asked if there is a rental fee paid for Art in the Park. Mr. Bohannon replied that somehow along the way that event used the park gratis. Regardless of weather, the event results in significant damage to the park and staff must do a lot of work after without financial support from the organizers. Ms. Krautman advised changing that agreement. Ms. Sadoski agreed and said it has been a complicated issue over the long-term and she suggested referencing past minutes to understand more of the nuances, despite which the Board agreed it is a wonderful event for the community (Labor Day weekend 2019). Mr. Foskett recalled the Friends received a \$100 donation in the past for the event, but the City has not. Chair Winsor said that unfortunately, it is very common for a user group to not understand the damage they cause; he agreed Art in the Park is a great event, but also a sensitive subject to determine how to charge a group that has always been allowed for free. Mr. Bohannon recalled the Friends' intent to have a booth at the event this year to collect donations, which Mr. Foskett said they had done in the past with minimal funds raised. The Board hopes the renewed effort will be successful.

Mr. Foskett said there was a fire in one of the trash cans next to the gazebo a few months ago, which Mr. Bohannon was not aware of but will look into.

8) Next Meeting – October 8, 2019

With members away and little for the agenda, the Board agreed to cancel the September 10th meeting and to meet again on October 8, 2019.

Mr. Foskett moved to postpone the September 10, 2019 meeting until October 8, 2019. Councilor Hooper seconded the motion, which the Board carried unanimously.

9) Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Chair Winsor adjourned the meeting at 8:43 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katrnya Kibler, Minute Taker
August 19, 2019

Reviewed by Andy Bohannon
Edited by Kristy Morrison