

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, December 8, 2020

8:00 AM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

Arthur Winsor, Chair
Councilor Steve Hooper, Vice Chair
Judy Sadoski
Dave Whaley
Paul Bocko
Suzy Krautmann
Thomas Haynes, Alternate

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, PRF Director

Members Not Present:

1) Welcome & Call to Order

Chair Winsor called the meeting to order at approximately 8:00 AM. Mr. Bohannon read the executive authority to conduct a remote meeting and conducted roll call.

2) Acceptance of November 10, 2020 Minutes

Ms. Sadoski moved to accept the minutes of November 10, 2020, which Ms. Krautmann seconded, and the motion passed with a unanimous roll call vote.

3) Finance Update

Mr. Bohannon reported that he received the AGM landscaping bill and the budget was updated, having spent to date \$19,979.20 of the \$22,000 approved for the 2020 calendar year. The difference is due to less travel than anticipated for Conway students due to the pandemic. Landscaping is complete for the year.

4) Conway Master Plan

Mr. Bohannon said that he had yet to fill-in any associated costs or target dates, but he had cleaned-up the spreadsheet list of 10 things the group at prioritized collectively: Remove the Gazebo, Mascoma Bank Entrance, Starbucks Entrance, More Seating, Wayfinding Signage,

Safety in RMOLL (Rachel Marshall Outdoor Learning Lab), Gazebo for All, Information Center, Tree Removal, and Water Access. Mr. Bohannon said two things would help achieve these goals, with one being definitive and the other still unknown. Last month he and the Public Works Director met with the NH Dam Bureau, from which a report is pending. While the Bureau has yet to decide whether the dam should be removed, he said they expressed fair confidence that they would have the official report providing that direction to the City by late spring 2021. Having that decision would be beneficial with regard to the Conway Master Plan.

Mr. Bohannon also reported meeting recently with Keene's two Rotary Clubs and the Keene Interact. Due to Covid-19, those groups are foregoing their spring international mission trip in favor of local service that they will carry out at Ashuelot River Park during the last week of April. They could contribute finances and labor to construction of the pergola, which would require Mr. Bohannon to ensure the site work is completed removing gazebo in preparation for that time. There are also new benches that need to be installed. They have indicated willingness to commit \$10,000-\$15,000. Covid-19 protocols would still be adhered to. Work would likely occur over two to three days in four hour periods. Other work could include the Rachel Marshall side of the bridge and defining the Mascoma Bank entrance, including signs to be created by Peter Poanessa that might be available for installation that week.

Chair Winsor asked if the pergola would be located in the same place as the gazebo. Mr. Bohannon said it was a matter for discussion. If the gazebo is removed, Mr. Bohannon envisioned the pergola spanning from one side of the lawn to the path behind the structure, with four benches on the ends of that space accompanying each beam supporting the structure. He said that like everyone now, landscape architects too are now planning with Covid-19 and social distancing in mind. A challenge moving forward is how to honor the social aspect of a park safely. In the space he envisioned, there would be sufficient space to distance safely without being socially awkward.

Ms. Sadoski asked whether he was talking about the pergola going toward the street with the bed with overgrown trees behind it. Mr. Bohannon replied that he thought it was the bed before the one Ms. Sadoski mentioned that is the problem; the conifer bed that inhibits sight lines to the gazebo. He offered to take photos of the space from different angles to share with the Board very soon for consideration before the next meeting. Ms. Sadoski thought the images would be very helpful and she offered to help as well.

Ms. Krautmann said she needed to see a blueprint to best envision, including the length of benches proposed, for example; she needed something more to visualize. Mr. Bohannon agreed and added that any bench the City installs that is not Rail Trail-designated would be standard four feet long because it is uncomfortable to sleep on for the standard adult.

Chair Winsor asked if the Conway plans showed proposed locations for the pergola. Mr. Bohannon said they submitted photos of a pergola but no detailed sketch. He needed to solicit

price estimates for a pergola to submit at the next Rotary meeting and so he could provide more details to the Board at the January meeting, to accompany a discussion of the 2021 budget.

Mr. Bocko asked if Mr. Bohannon envisioned the pergola as a walk through that garden bed. Mr. Bohannon said yes but he was open to discussion. Mr. Bocko liked the idea, short of seeing a specific plan; he thought it would open the area and wondered if it would create another unestablished walkway of beaten down grass. Mr. Bohannon understood, citing the area in front of the current gazebo that has to be consistently refilled with cobbles because of such wear and tear. He also said to keep in mind that different materials could be used in the pergola instead of cobbles, such as stone dust, which withstands more traffic. He briefly cited other ideas that he would formalize as drawings and share with the Board.

The Board thanked Mr. Bohannon for interfacing with the Rotary groups to great benefit for the park. Mr. Bohannon thought it would be a lot of work for significant payout. Chair Winsor recalled that the park was constructed originally in approximately two weeks by adults and children. While not present, Mr. Bohannon recalled that Dian Mathews is attending the Master Gardener program at University of New Hampshire and her goal is to have other master gardeners in the area and members of the Friends of the Arboretum at Ashuelot Park attending that week as well for plantings. Mr. Bohannon is looking forward to coordinating many stakeholders for what could be a great park transformation within one week.

Mr. Bocko asked if there were any specific ideas at this time for Rotary work that occur on the Rachel Marshall side of the bridge. Mr. Bohannon replied that it would be good to clear the area with a brush hog as in the past or to identify trees to allow to grow and replace those that have matured/fallen. That would allow opportunity to begin defining informal gathering spaces with greater sight lines. Then, programming could begin for that portion of the park, such as recent discussions with the Monadnock Conservancy. Mr. Bocko hopes to be involved as programming begins and although perhaps not in the same capacity, he hopes to get a K-12 student/school group involved again.

5) Bat House Update

Mr. Bohannon said he owed Councilor Hooper and Mr. Bocko an apology because despite their diligence, Mr. Bohannon had not followed-up with his staff before this meeting to determine if the bat houses were successfully relocated, though he knows locations were scouted.

Councilor Hooper recalled that due to an unfortunate miscommunication three of the four bat houses were installed originally too close to the walking trails, which is a deterrent to bat use. Markers were placed 15-20 feet further into the woods for the houses to be relocated but he was also unsure whether the work was complete. In response to Ms. Krautmann, the Councilor recalled that the houses should also be reinstalled facing south and east for more warmth during hibernation. Additionally, Councilor Hooper said that bats prefer to roost in an area with more daytime warmth and so the houses are being relocated from shady areas to those with more sun.

This relocation will help the bats that are already threatened by environmental factors and diseases. In response to Mr. Whaley, the Councilor recalled that the houses are 9-10 feet high off the ground. The fourth bat house by the bridge was always deemed educational and therefore would not be moved. Mr. Bohannon would provide another update next month.

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

No representative present. Mr. Bohannon reported that George Foskett resigned from this Board and Dian Mathews, who is replacing Mr. Foskett as the Friends' Chair, is seeking confirmation from City Council to replace him on this Board. Mr. Bohannon said that Ms. Mathews has a lot of energy and has already sought grants on behalf of the Friends. She is also a member of the Monadnock Garden Club. She will bring a unique skill set of value to the Board.

Mr. Bohannon noted Mr. Foskett's years of service and value provided to the Board, and his efforts reestablishing the Friends in good non-profit standing. Now, they have four or five individuals dedicated to park improvement. Board members agreed it is a good idea to honor Mr. Foskett's years of service formally in some way once Covid-19 has calmed. Mr. Foskett will remain an active member of the Friends.

7) Park Discussion

Mr. Bohannon cited recent events in Manchester, NH, where he said homeless residence in a local park was mishandled. He said that Mayor George Hansel has been active in the Governor's discussions on approaches to homelessness in the state and this recent event spurred conversations between local Keene agencies on how to develop a plan. Throughout the effort some unique ideas have been offered. This all aligns with concerns about homelessness that this Board has discussed for many years.

Mr. Bohannon shared an idea that he pitched during these ongoing discussions. He said that among the homeless population there is a high degree of mental illness that can pose lifestyle challenges that some might take for granted, such as managing ones finances. In other park districts, he has seen success with work programs through which proven sober individuals with consistent attendance have a chance at financial stability. There is usually a life coach as a part of these programs as well to assist individuals toward the end goal of employment and housing. With the guidance of someone trained, Mr. Bohannon imagined the possibilities not just for the individuals but for the park through this endeavor.

Councilor Hooper supported Mr. Bohannon's idea. It is something the Councilor has researched in his role, and along with fellow City Councilors Raleigh Ormerod and Jan Manwaring, as potential ways to help homeless and mental health issues. He said the program Mr. Bohannon cited is a great positive possibility in addition to other job program models that have proven to contribute to one's feeling of dignity and self-worth through contributing to something

meaningful. Councilor Hooper supports this program and finding the funds to do so if the opportunity is ever before City Council.

8) Adjourn – Next Meeting Date: January 12, 2021 at 8:00 AM

Being Councilor Hooper's final Board meeting, he stated that he has thoroughly enjoyed working with everyone on the Board for the past five years, including Chair Winsor and Mr. Bohannon as leaders. Councilor Hooper wanted everyone to know he did not take this resignation lightly, but the Mayor asked him to serve as the City representative on the Board of Cheshire TV, where there have been many recent struggles. Therefore, due to time constraints, the Councilor must resign from this Board but will remain supporting the park in a volunteer capacity and hopefully organizing a bird class with Mr. Bohannon this spring. The Board thanked Councilor Hooper for his years of service to this Board and the park.

There being no further business, Chair Winsor adjourned the meeting at 9:00 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker
December 14, 2020

Edits Submitted by,
Andy Bohannon, Staff
December 22, 2020